The Maternal Uncle

Fakir Mohan Senapati



Translated by
Jatindra K. Nayak

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RUPANTAR

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Contents

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Introduction

In *Mamu*, Fakir Mohan Senapati handles at greater length, and with more of the digressions and elaborations expected in a novel or romance, the theme, which he pursued tersely and economically, about the same time, in his story 'Birei Bisal'. The exploitation by an uncle of an orphan's fatherless condition— self-aggrandisement hiding behind the pretence that only "family" are trustworthy, and that the child's other well-wishers are interlopers who must be kept at bay— is common to both. Biographical interpreters of Fakir Mohan's work (notably Boulton) would find the germ of this in his resentment against the uncle, Purushottam, who stepped into the parental role when the infant Fakir Mohan lost both father and mother, but it would appear that his complaints against Purushottam were concerned more with personal harshness and lack of sympathy than with any significant financial wrongdoing. Unless the active wickedness of the fictional uncles is to be seen as a covert raising of the stakes against Purushottam, the difference between fact and fiction suggests that Fakir Mohan at least distanced himself more effectively from early traumas than Dickens, for instance, had done when retelling the story of his father's improvidence and his own stint in the blacking-factory, in *David Copperfield* and elsewhere. A tone of ironic detachment is achieved by Fakir Mohan even when describing the worst enormities of Natabar Das (the *nazar*)— and this may be because he can see external causes, both local and national, for the uncle's corruption of heart and mind.

In *Mamu* one senses that, as elsewhere in Fakir Mohan, his middle-to-upper class Oriyas are experiencing the worst of both worlds – traditional ways, themselves not entirely flawless, are losing ground before modern (and essentially western) ideas which have begun to spread piecemeal without the requisite degree of order,

system and affluence to accompany them. Pitambar Chhotray foregoes the traditional role of zamindar to become a "young professional" – not, alas, an upwardly mobile one in any real sense – because he values western education and is a "student of human nature" as associated with the Collector's busy urban life. He thereby forfeits the chance to protect relatives whom he understands and respects, but who might have been better off with an uneducated feudal landowner on their side. The real kindness shown by Collector Dawson to Natabar's family, at the time of the father Dasarathi's illness and death, prepares the way for Natabar's mendacious assertions that "the sahib" has appointed him to take charge of Chandamani's family and household when she loses her husband. Chandamani's literacy and modern education predispose the Collector and his wife to think of her as an "enlightened" woman who can be named as zamindar in her own right: in their eyes, to place her under the guardianship of the law-courts or of her nearest male relative, would be to insult her and the cause of women's emancipation— so much in the air when the novel was written in 1913. Really, however, she is "traditional" enough to be (and is applauded by the narrator for being) entirely absorbed in her love for her husband, and mentally prostrated by his death – so that to put her in the office of zamindar is to place everything in the unofficial, but highly retentive, grasp of the *nazar* himself. (Similarly, Menaka Dei's ownership of property independently of her husband, which ought to have guaranteed her financial security, merely gives her son Natabar another opportunity to fill his coffers. The well-meaning sahib and memsahib are also cut down to size by the fact that the *nazar* practices on them exactly the same petty frauds that his worthy consort Chitrakala ("tigress" to his "tiger") used to curry favour with his hapless wife. Neither western law and culture nor the "mother-wit" of the Oriya housewife is proof against a really skilled flatterer or tale-bearer. Even the magistrate Mr. Jones, naturally less amiable than Dawson or having had more disillusioning experiences while in India, so that he reacts to Indians with a brusque skepticism which wins him no friends, is taken in as easily as anyone.

Natabar does not start out as an evil being: as a younger brother but a better student, fortunately able to make his own way in the

world, he would seem entitled to a degree both of sympathy and of respect when Banambar inherits from their father. But the love of money is latent in him, and becomes dominant when— the worst of both worlds again— his Westernized career makes him feel superior to his rurally-minded father and brother (just as Prabhudayal looks down on his father, the moneylender— while some fairly crude superstitions about his bride's horoscope draw him to her as being a bringer of wealth, and make him take her side against his sweeter-natured female relatives. She herself is pathetic in her self-absorbed ignorance of the facts of village life— her selfish ways do not even make her, in Wilde's phrase, one "who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing", for she signally fails to know what things cost, and so favours dishonest servants over reliable ones. Perhaps making a satirical point, perhaps covering up for having neglected to invent names for her earlier, Fakir Mohan tells us only in chapter forty-two that she is called Bishki or Bishakha, but because she is a respectable wife her personal name is hardly ever mentioned— certainly not by the "men in the street" who he implies are his informants for this tale of village life. The similarly late introduction of her clumsy, peasant-like brother Raghab— an alarmingly barbaric figure to the sheltered Naru Babu, and despised by the superficially refined Chitrakala— is a reminder of her comparatively humble origins, while her simple-minded mother takes the glamorous appearance of Chitrakala, supposedly Bishakha's servant, as a proof of the heights to which the *nazar* and his wife have risen. In fact, it is one of the signs of the household's moral degeneracy, the mark of the false ascetic trying to impress others with a sense of his religious devotion.

Chitrakala is a much more refined version of Champa, the malevolent and conniving servant of *Cha Mana Atha Guntha.* Her physical beauty is real, not an ironic conceit of the narrator's like the charms attributed to Champa— in *Mamu,* such sarcastic comments are directed more often at largely sympathetic characters such as Gelhei and Raghab. If these are benevolent Dickensian grotesques, the good looks of Chitrakala are far from being evidence of a good heart. She is such an accomplished liar that she is hardly ever seen at a loss, except when the mock-heroic "battle of women" briefly leaves

her as confused and aghast as her village hairdresser adversary. Mostly, she moves in a higher sphere than that poor old widow, and her status parodies that of the loving and supportive aunt Saraswati Dei, who benevolently rules a relative's household and mothers the children, whereas Chitrakala encroaches on a family where she has no right to be. Fakir Mohan ironically comments that women such as she once had a defined role (presumably he means that of a concubine or courtesan) but "respectability", a new concept in the Indian family, has made things more complicated. This may be seen no doubt in the series of totally fictitious but socially acceptable roles (maidservant, rich heiress in need of a male adviser, protégée and messenger of a senior relative) which are given to Chitrakala by the *nazar* or by herself during the story. Society is in a state of flux, and while evildoers like these were in no sense created by the sahibs, foreign influences can be seen as giving stronger incentives for them to yield to their bad impulses, and subtler ways of making them.

The older ways of life appear at their best in the piety of the forlorn old women in the Uttararay palace, which even leads the narrator to contradict his earlier characterizations—here and in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*— of a houseful of women servants as a hornets' nest of noisy quarrels and gossip. They show exemplary loyalty to the zamindar's family, and fully appreciate the generous nature of Saraswati, which for the *nazar* was merely something to be exploited. The village moneylender Sahu— initially presented in somewhat dubious terms, as he seems to invoke disproportionate supernatural penalties on any who break faith with him financially, and he is both illiterate and physically uncouth— also reacts to Saraswati with honesty and goodwill. The self-revelatory letter of Gokul Patanaik, in which this venal agent of Natabar deplores the fact that the barber Haribol is spreading tolerance and reconciliation among his neighbours and preventing quarrels from which lawyers and landlords might benefit, convey a possibility of mutual peace and solidarity among the poor and unlettered, if their supposed superiors would only leave them to their own devices. At the feast organized by Chandamani and Saraswati, which nonetheless takes its tone from the robust village revellers instead of the more refined style of the ladies or of the scholarship boy whom they are honouring, all castes

mix harmoniously and forget their distinctions. This forgetfulness of caste is not seen as necessarily a good trait— in other contexts, where an individual is seeking personal gratification, it can appear as vicious as the *nazar*'s brandy-drinking, and Prabhudayal's excommunication by the caste council for accepting food from a low-caste woman does not seem to be criticized, as it might well be, as a disproportionate response from a council which might have been better employed in seeking to draw him back to his family rather than forcing him further out into the rootless, ambiguous role of a servant of the sahibs.

At the same time, the British doctor who attends on Chandamani is, almost by definition, both competent and incorruptible, qualities which protect the patient from the implied conspiracy to poison her which lies behind the native *vaidya*'s treatment. Nor is the old belief in tiny inaccessible windows, as the best means of not losing caste through people looking into one's room, seen as admirable: its association with the *nazar*, like the reference to imprisonment in Gokul's letter foreshadows the loss of both formal caste and genuine integrity which is to come. The *nazar*'s downfall is heralded by his having, at one and the same time, insulted a Hindu astrologer, bullied and robbed the Moslem Khuda Bux, and profaned the Christian festival of Good Friday by his intrigues. He ranges against himself the descendants of both the Pathans whose incursion into Orissa first brought the Uttarays to prominence and the Paiks or Khandayats who "would die rather than yield". The handling of his final repentance, as Boulton implies, has a certain ambiguity, as he is first seen arraigning himself for sins against first one, then another person, almost as dispassionately as the court judgement will assign blame to him and his associates, but he is not without self-interest even now as he worries about whether his nephews, if reconciled to him, will offer prayers for his soul in the after life, and later, in court, he rants and raves in (perhaps temporary) insanity. The court judgement, true to the fair but limited nature of the justice system as imposed from above, has nothing to say about the *nazar*'s mental state or whether he will recover. It is, on the whole, the *nazar*'s own "summing-up" which is the more memorable, since it pays full tribute to the moral beauty of the novel's good characters (including Collector

Dawson) which a legalistic analysis leaves unmentioned. Similarly, in a novel otherwise lacking in natural and topographical description, Chandamani's meditation in the decayed orchard, on the beauty and order (prevailing among both native and foreign plants) which has been brought almost to nothing by misrule and neglect, has a haunting quality. There are many roads to Hell for the unwary like Raghab and his sister – a man may get drunk on "foreign brandy" or on "country liquor", drive in a motor-car (possibly the only reference to such a vehicle in Fakir Mohan's fiction, and seemingly at variance with the date 1879 given later in the story) or be lured on by the old-style nautch girls "making faces and jangling their anklets", only to land oneself in prison; or by abusing the privileges of a loved wife and daughter, and feeling no compassionate interest in anyone outside a narrow family circle, a woman like Bishakha may end up a virtual outcast, parted from both husband and mother. The hope of redemption must be confined to those who know that the world does not exist for their benefit or convenience.

Mamu: The Maternal Uncle

Chapter One
Dasarathi Das's Family

A home resembles heaven when mutual love animates it.

Baboo Dasarathi Das worked as a deed writer at the *munshikhana* of Cuttack collectorate. His salary was small and, given the nature of his job, the scope for making money under the table was somewhat restricted. But he was a member of the celebrated *karana* caste, a caste known for its ability to make money even by counting the waves of the sea. However, from time to time, Dasarathi did make an extra rupee or two. After all, he had to live in a manner befitting his position in society. He lived in a rented house in Sabjada Bazaar in Cuttack. He came from the village of Rukunadeipur near Jagatsinghpur, in Sumada *pragana*. He kept a servant for it was difficult to manage without one. Dasrathi's servant stayed with him in his rented house. Since he belonged to Dasarathi's own caste, there was no problem about his doing the cooking and other household chores. But, as days went by, the expenditure on provisions bought from the market increased. Obviously the servant had begun to line his own pocket. He had become worldly wise. After all he too had to look after his own interests.

Dase now realised that it was not possible to support two establishments in two different places on a small income like his. However faithful he may be a servant is always a servant. Again, his two boys were now grown–ups. It was time they were taught some English. Given the dependence of their caste on government jobs, they would not get any employment these days if they did not learn English. Guided by these considerations, Dasarathi at last rented a house in Dargha Bazaar in Cuttack, which was big enough to accommodate his whole family, which included his wife, Menaka

Dei, his eldest son, Banamber, his youngest son, Natabar and Saraswati Dei. Menaka Dei was always out of sorts— she was afflicted with all manner of ailments: stomachache, headache and so on for six days out of the seven in a week. The house was managed by Saraswati Dei. Cooking and all the other chores of the house were her responsibility. Dasarathi's income was an inconsiderable one and his family had to live within it. It would not do to keep a servant just to flatter one's vanity. On the first day of every month, Dase would hand his salary to Saraswati Dei and feel that his responsibilities ended there. For her part, Saraswati Dei ordered household affairs so efficiently that nobody ever had any reason for complaining.

Chapter Two
The Uttararay Family

Earlier we talked about the affairs of Baboo Dasarathi Das's family. From his door no wandering singer or a beggar ever returned empty-handed. If a beggar made a racket and would not leave, Saraswati Dei would never lose her temper; she would talk sweetly to him, call him 'my son, my dear' and make him accept a handful of rice. Not a single day passed without several guests visiting at the house. Saraswati looked after them very well, but all the while taking care that she did not go to great expenses on their account. They all felt very pleased. These guests had rich well-placed relatives in Cuttack, but they always preferred to come first to Das's house. From morning till midnight Saraswati Dei spun like a wheel; she did not have the time even to wipe her nose. But her face never betrayed any sign of vexation; it was always lit up with a smile. She slept after everyone else went to bed, and she left it before everyone else got up. The manner in which Das's family lived made many people wonder how so much comfort could be enjoyed on such a small income. Since we have sat down to write about the affairs of Das's family, we must go into and thoroughly explain every detail. Three generations of Das's family including his father's worked as record-keepers for the zamindar of Naripur, Samant Chhotray. As a reward for their loyal and faithful service they received from the zamindar fifty acres of land. From this land tenant farmers sent them rice every year. Although the land was rent-free, a member of Das's family went to the zamidar's house on the first day of every Oriya new year and made a present of a new stylus and a palm leaf. But for the last five years now, this practice had been discontinued. The reason was—we would have to say many things if we gave the reason, and the

esteemed readers might not find them to their taste. They are at liberty to turn over a few pages if they so want; but we would advise them not to be impatient. Suppose we have to raise a mansion. Of course, it will be necessary to buy a lot of stones and bricks to lay its foundation. These will not in any way contribute to the beauty of the mansion, which stands on these stones and bricks. However, we must remember that our narrative is nothing like a literary mansion, it is but a modest structure; nevertheless it cannot do without a foundation.

An army of *pathan*s chose Katlu Khan as their general and crossed river Subarnrekha and entered into Orissa to escape the Mogul emperor. The independent kings of Orissa had to adopt a number of measures to obstruct their progress. Chief among these was the setting up of military stations at different places in the kingdom. These stations were known as *choupadhi*s. Such military stations have survived into the present time, but they are not called *choupadhi*s, they are called forts instead. In each *choupadhi* a commander was placed in charge of an army, whose strength varied from five to six hundred khandayat soldiers according to the needs of each military station. These soldiers did not receive monthly salary in cash; they were given land grants commensurate with their military rank. In course of time, this land had become hereditary property. The task of the commander was to prevent the *pathan*s from entering the kingdom and making mischief. Naripur fort was one of the aforementioned *choupadhi*s. The name of its first commander, who was appointed by the king, was Birabara Malla. For this reason the family of the zamindar of Naripur came to be known an Uttararays. Several generations later, Nabaghan Uttararay, a descendant of Birabara Mardaraj Uttararay, had four sons: Parthasarathi Baghasingh, Bhimsen Harichandan, Satrughan Bhramarbar, Sanatan Aridaman. In the past, the hot-blooded *khandayat*s thought nothing of picking up their swords and jumping into a fray for the flimsiest of reasons. Nabaghan divided the landed property into four equal parts and gave each son his share in order to ensure the well-being of the families and to prevent conflict between the brothers. But such a division of family property among brothers was in fact not legally acceptable. According to the royal statutes, *jagir* land could pass only to the eldest son. But, as Nabaghan's sons were deeply devoted

to him, and as they wanted no harm to come to their family, the division of property was accomplished without a hitch. However, it was mentioned in Nabaghan Uttararay's will that, in the event of any brother dying childless, his property in land would pass to the eldest brother. Having settled the matter of dividing his property in this manner, Nabaghan went to Puri and ended his days there.

For a few years the four brothers jointly owned the land and lived together in Naripur fort. But in course of time differences cropped up among them. The youngest brother, Sanatan Aridaman separated from his brothers and set up home in Fatehpur fort, which was the mofussil cutcherry of the zamindari and lay at a distance of three miles from Naripur. His descedants came to be known as Chhotrays. The second and third sons of Nabaghan died without issue, and their property passed into the hands of their eldest son, Parthsarathi. In consequence, he came to own three fourths of the entire property.

When our story begins, Parthsarathi Uttarray was dead, and his zamindari had been placed under the court of words. His minor son, Pratap Udit Malla Uttararay, was studying in Cuttack under the care of the Government. His uncle, Sanatan Aridaman left his son Pitambar with him in Cuttack in order that he too might receive an English education. Pratap Udit and Pitambar were about the same age, and the two were extremely fond of each other. They slept together, read together, wandered about together— one did not part with the other even for a moment. Although, in terms of family relations, they were brothers, they called each other *sangata* out of deep mutual affection. Never did a quarrel sour the relationship between the families to which the two friends belonged. However, five or six years ago there had occurred a mild tiff concerning gifts presented on the occasion of the first day of the Oriya new year. Taking advantage of this, many stopped giving this new year gift. Dasarathi Das, too, stopped sending to the zamindar the gift of a stylus and a palm leaf since that time.

Chapter Three
Chandamani

Prasanna dikpanshudibaktabatah
Sankhaswanantara duspabrustih
Saririnam dthabarjangamanam
Sukhaya dajjanmadinam babbhuba.

(The sky was cloudless/ the breeze free of dust/ Flowers rained down at the sound of conch shells/ The day of her birth brought joy/ To the moving as well as the moveless.)

A baby girl was born to Dasarathi Das a year after he brought his family over to Cuttack. The child took birth on the full-moon day of the month of *Magha*, exactly at the time of the moonrise. Usually, a newborn baby cries 'kuan, kuan' at the time of birth, but the newborn girl's voice sounded like sweet notes from a veena. A conch is blown when a male child is born. The birth of a girl child is never greeted with the blowing of a conch-shell. But Saraswati was beside herself with joy; her hair was dishevelled, her feet barely touched the ground. She picked up a conch-shell and blew it hard. The baby, who looked like a golden image sculpted by a master craftsman, lay there throwing about its arms and legs. Shiny black, short silken hair covered her head thickly. Her face was lovely like a lotus flower. The forehead had the smoothness of a polished mirror, and the beauty of the face was heightened by a small flawless nose straight like the sharp edge of a sword. A pair of elegant eyebrows, which seemed to have been drawn by an expert artist using a delicate brush, stretched far as the ears. Below them lotus-like eyes, which resembled those of a young doer, seemed to swim in limpid water. Drops of *hingula* fell from her comely lips. Her well-formed feet and her palms were a deep

red, as if they had been painted with lac dye. The nails were white like little pieces of silver and her shapely neck had the whiteness of a slightly elongated conch shell.

Saraswati Dei possessed all possible skills. So there was no need to send for a mid-wife. The mother was made comfortable and a separate little bed was prepared for the baby. For the protection, growth and sustenance of all created beings, God, the Merciful One, has planted in the hearts of women a strong, irresistible love for children. Many a childless woman satisfy this god-given instinct in themselves by looking after the children of other women. Some childless women, who do not get an opportunity to do even this, find pleasure in rearing a parrot or a kitten. Saraswati Dei was a very loving and affectionate person; when her eyes fell on this exceedingly beautiful baby girl, all the love and all the affection which had lain locked up in her heart now began to overflow.

The ritual of *panchuati* was to be celebrated on the fifth day of the birth of the baby. A maternal uncle of the new born was needed for the observance of this ritual. But where was one to be found? A distantly related gentleman from the *karana* caste made himself available and duly observed the required rites. Why one maternal uncle? A host of such uncles could have come forward to offer their services had anyone only asked them to, for the ritual took only a minute to be performed. The uncle was given a quantity of fine rice, vegetables and two pieces of cloth for his pains. So who would refuse to step into the role of a maternal uncle on an occasion like this? The ritual of *sathighara* was to be observed on the sixth day of the birth of the newborn. During the day Saraswati Dei built an abode for goddess Sathi by slapping balls of clay on the wall. She adorned these with two hundred cowries purchased from the market. An offering of seven *chitou* cakes, a quantity of rice and black grams roasted together, some molasses and seven sweets were placed in front of the abode of goddess Sathi. The goddess herself in the shape of a grinding stone covered with a piece of yellow cloth, sat leaning against the wall of her abode. Worship of the goddess began at night with Saraswati Dei putting blades of *duba* grass, *barakoli* leaves, and a few flowers on the goddess's head. The mother sat before the goddess, the baby lying in her lap. Seven women, whose husbands

were alive, were needed on the occasion to throw unhusked rice and blades of *duba* grass on the heads of the mother and the child. Cuttack was not a village, where every one knew every one else. Dase, therefore, had taken seven such women and they punctually appeared when the worship began. After doing their bit for the puja, the women left, each taking a *chitou* cake, some roasted rice and black gram, and a sweet. A palm leaf soaked in water mixed with turmeric powder and a stylus were placed before goddess Sathi and then the door of her abode was bolted from the outside. The door was not to be opened throughout the night for goddess Sathi would inscribe on the palm leaf the child's fate, everything good or evil that would befall the child in the course of her whole life. On the same palm leaf would be written the child's horoscope.

On the ninth day after the birth of the child arrived Sadashib Khadiratna, the astrologer, a palmleaf almanac tucked under his arm, and a stick in his right hand. Saraswati Dei promptly rolled out a mat on the verandah and placed before him a seer of fine-grained rice, an areca nut, a few blades of *duba* grass and *barakoli* leaves, and the palm leaf and the stylus which had been earlier placed in front of goddess Sathi. The astrologer leant his stick against the wall in a corner and sat himself down on the mat. Then he took out the bundle of palm leaves from under his arm and took out a pair of glasses, which had belonged to his father, from a wooden case. He thoroughly cleaned the glasses rubbing them hard with a fold of his cloth and placed them on the bridge of his nose. Holding the palm leaf in both hands he recited:

Mangalam Bhagaban Vishnuh
Mangalam Garudadhwajah
Mangalam punderikakshah
Mangalam Madhusudanah

(Praise to Lord Vishnu/ Praise to the one whose flag bears Garuda/ Praise to the lotus-eyed God/ And praise to the destroyer of the demon Madhu)

After the chanting of the *sloka* was over, he looked into the almanac and made observations about the month, the week, the day

and the position of the planets. Then he gently placed the palm leaf bundle on the ground. He brought out a piece of chalk from a fold in his waist cloth, and again chanting '*Mangalam Bhagaban Bishnuh*', he wrote out 'sri' on the ground, and then wiped it off. He touched his forehead reverentially with the piece of chalk and cast a horoscope on the ground, indicating the position in it of various planets. At last he drew a circle around the horoscope and placed the piece of chalk in it.

The astrologer set to work studying the horoscope very carefully, touching a few points in it with his finger, and deliberating over it in a voice that sounded like a hum. The recitation of a good number of *sloka*s followed this. Dase sat close by, Saraswati Dei sat some distance away, and Menaka Dei, only her nose showing, sat behind a door listening to the *slokas*. The astrologer said, 'Let me tell you, Dase? This is no ordinary girl. She is a child of the gods. I have examined one hundred and ten thousand horoscopes but never one like this. The child is born under the sign of Cancer. Jupiter occupies a high place. The position which signifies wealth is occupied by the Moon. The position of the Sun in her horoscope indicates that she'd be pious and virtuous. What else do you want to know?
It is said:

Jatangana bhabati burna bibhuti jukta
Swadhvi supputra banami sukhini dhanadhya

Saraswati asked, 'What did you say sir? What does this mean?'

The astrologer— The horoscope tells us that this girl will become a queen, and give birth to very bonny good-looking boys. And since the Moon occupies a favourable second position, she will possess immeasurable wealth. In the third position, one finds Ketu. This indicates that she may come to grief on account of her brother. And there is one thing. I can't keep it from you since the horoscope makes it so obvious. Mars occupying the eighth place in a woman's horoscope is not an auspicious sign— it signifies grief on account of loss of husband.

Saraswati— But suppose you omit to mention it in the horoscope?

The astrologer—No. No. That is beyond our powers. Mars has already established himself in the eighth place. But so what? There

is a way out. The evil can be averted by performing a simple ritual. Many great evils have been averted in this manner. This is a small problem, after all.

Saraswati Dei— What is to be done? What rites are to be performed?.

The astrologer— A black ram, or a black billy goat, five measures of fine-grained rice, a seer of black gram, a seer of five-coloured offerings, flowers of five different colours, five *barakoli* leaves, an ounce and a half of pure gold, a piece of *maniabandh* cloth in which there should be no trace of red or yellow— all these things you will offer to the astrologer at midnight on the twenty-first day after the birth of the child. Having offered these, you will turn around and quickly walk away. For twenty-one days after this you will never set your eyes upon the face of the astrologer. And mind you, the offering has to be made at the exact moment when the planet Mars reaches the Ashlesa star. If it is delayed by even the fraction of a moment, the auspicious time will pass. I shall be waiting with my almanac. I have forgotten one thing. You have to give me a *dakshina* of one rupee and four annas.

On saying this, the astrologer recited:

Madhabo Madhabo bakyam
Madhabo Madhabo Harih
Smaranti Madhabo nityam
Sarba karyesu Madhabah

(Pious men take the name of Lord Madhaba every moment)

Then he wiped out the horoscope with water mixed with turmeric powder. He carried the rice on the plate in a bundle, received a rupee as his *dakshina* and took his leave.

Today, a name was to be given to the child. The astrologer had instructed that the name of the child should begin with the syllable 'Cha'. Dase said, "I was promoted to the post of the Nazar the day the baby was born. Like goddess Lakshmi she has brought me prosperity. Let us give her the name, Lakshmi.' The mother of the baby said, 'No, I want to name her Annapurna'. Saraswati Dei said, 'You may say whatever you like. I feel as if the moon has descended from heaven. My daughter will be called Chandamani.'

Chapter Four
Affairs of the *Nazar*'s Family

Life in the *nazar*'s family, like that in so many other families, was a happy one. But the peace and happiness enjoyed by his family was of a very different quality. As a matter of fact, true and lasting happiness is found in a middle class home only when the lady of the house is endowed with qualities such as virtue, piety and selflessness. The pomp and glamour of the rich, their glittering but empty lives, their easy access to the good things of life inspire jealousy in ordinary people; but the enjoyment of true, unalloyed happiness rarely falls to the lot of the wealthy. They remain so absorbed in amassing and increasing their wealth, and in clearing the obstacles on their way to prosperity that they never find any time for their inner selves. Again, the thought that in the course of pursuing one's own interests one ought not to harm one's fellow-human beings rarely occurs to them. What they regard as their desirable goal in the end fills their lives with the poison of unending misery. And they die in utter agony with their eyes riveted on their tainted wealth.

The lives of the very poor, on the other hand, are wretched in another way. A life cursed with want brings them acute misery. On occasions, in trying to relieve their want, they seek to earn money adopting dishonest means and thereby bring great suffering down on themselves in afterlife. Instances of men acquiring ill-begotten wealth through uncontrolled greed are of course not rare, but it is poverty, which is responsible for the misdeeds of most people. However, virtuous, and pious members of the middle class are spared this ordeal.

Das's two boys now were at school. His wife, after the birth of her daughter, had remained bedridden for the last one year. To attend

to her, doctors and *kavirajas* regularly visited the house. The baby girl could not have her mother's milk; so she had to live on other kinds of liquid diet. As you know milkmen are as jealous about their caste privileges as they are eager to make money. They feel seven generations of their ancestors will be consigned to hell if they do not dilute their milk with water. Even the most reliable among these cowmen, after you give him more for milk of better quality, cannot help putting a little water into his milk. How can they neglect a time-honoured trading practice? Saraswati Dei thoroughly understood the ways of these cowmen. To buy milk from them for the baby was as good as buying diseases.

The water the cowmen mixed with their milk did not come from a well or a pond. They diluted their milk with any water they found close at hand, no matter even if it happened to be dirty. Who would knowingly give such milk to a sucking baby? A milch cow was, therefore, brought to Das's house. It placed an extra burden on the household budget. But, as if He had anticipated this, God, the merciful one, arranged to make Das's income somewhat larger than before. However, Saraswati Dei was so careful of spending money that the expenditure never exceeded the income, and, after the household expenses had been met, there was never any dearth of money to be spent on rituals performed in order to ensure the well-being of the mother and the child. There was now more work to be done in the house than before. From morning, when the crows cawed, till midnight, Saraswati Dei remained so busy that she would not find the time even to wipe her nose. But she never got tired nor did she ever lose her temper. On the contrary, her hands seemed to itch for more and more work. To her, work was a pleasure and a duty. In her opinion, it was only through work that one earned merit. Dase suggested several times that she hire a cook and a maidservant. Menaka Dei was tired of telling her to do the same. But Saraswati Dei chose to turn a deaf ear to them. One day, Menaka Dei lost her patience and said, 'Listen to me Sara. I'll never open my mouth even if you work yourself to death. Cut off my nose if you ever hear me say anything.' Saraswati Dei said, 'Well, sister, you wish me dead. But tell me who will give you a wash? Who'll grind your medicine and make you drink it every day?' Dase was listening to

this interesting exchange, sitting close by. He put in, 'O Saraswati Dei, I pray to you. Don't you die in obedience to your sister's wishes. Who'll lay out a meal for me before I leave for the cutcherry everyday?'

Menaka Dei said, 'Why? I'll get you a second wife. Your second wife will cook your meals.' Saraswati added, 'Brother-in-law. Don't you forget to massage your back with a little oil.' Dase asked, 'Why should I rub oil on my back?' Saraswati explained, 'Who knows? The bruises left by your second wife's broomstick may burn.' The three of them then burst into hearty laughter. The author would like to know if the secret joy that flows through such heart-warming laughter could ever be found in the storms of dry laughter which constantly blow through the houses of the rich.

Wherever Saraswati Dei went, Chandamani followed her all day clutching at the end border of her sari. She would not go near her mother, even when she called her. Feeling hurt, her mother would say, 'O you Chanda, is your Dhaima everything to you and I'm nothing!' In response to this, Chanda would only giggle and run off. Although Saraswati was their aunt, the children called her Dhaima. She had raised all of them; so, to them, their own mother was almost a stranger. Because all the children called her Dhaima, soon everyone else—the servants, the neighbours, the guests—began calling her Dhaima. Dase called her 'everyone's Dhaima.'

Chapter Five
Children's Education

Vitarati guruh prajne vidyam
Jathyeba tatha jade
Na to khalu tayorjnane shaktim
Karotyupahanti ba

- Bhababhuti

(A good teacher instructs the intelligent and the dull with the same care. One becomes a scholar, the other remains a fool.)

Dasarathi Das had two sons, Banambar and Natabar. Both went to an English school. For their sister Chandamani, daughter of a *karana* family, it was, of course, going to school walking down the open streets was simply out of the question. But Dhaima wanted that she should receive a little education. A Christian governess was, therefore, employed on a monthly salary. Chandamani received lessons in reading, making carpets and stockings, sewing and drawing. Although the two brothers and their sister were born of the same parents, their natures and their characters were widely dissimilar. Whatever the pundits may say, the qualities deeply ingrained in man's nature can be only temporarily suppressed; they can never be completely eliminated by moral instruction, good company, circumstances or qualities inherited from parents. Put more simply, although it is true that inherited and socially acquired qualities do regulate a man's life, instances of deviation from this principle are quite rare in the world.

All Das's children were handsome; they had well-formed figures and were a joy to look at. It would have been fortunate if all of them had been as good as their looks. The eldest, Banambar, was a good-looking, good-natured, virtuous and quiet boy. But he was not much

interested in his studies. The second son, Natabar, was bright and good at his studies, but he was shrewd and had a weakness for the good things of life. Even at a tender age, his miserly nature had begun to manifest itself. As for Chandamani, she had a figure of great beauty, and was endowed with the nature of an angel. She was also blessed by the goddess of learning. Although Dasarathi Das was willing to spend everything on his children's education, he had no time at all personally to supervise their studies. His work as the *nazar* kept him so occupied that he found little time even to eat properly. He, therefore, had to let the children do what they liked with their studies.

One evening, the *nazar* was having his dinner. After laying out the meal, Saraswati Dei fanned him with a plamleaf fan. Chandamani sat by her father's side, sharing his meal. This she did every evening. She ate a little, scattered grains of rice all around, from time to time she got up and ran about the room, and when Dhaima pulled her up, she came back and sat down by her father. Now and then she pulled the cat's tail with her hand still covered with rice. Dhaima said 'Tut, tut, don't do that, Chanda. You'll have cat's hair all over your hand'. She then turned to Dase and asked, 'Brother-in-law, tell me, who are those two boys who came to our house this afternoon? You were sitting on the verandah at the time. Did you see them?' Dase said, 'Which boys? Oh, you mean those boys? They belong to the Uttararay family.' Saraswati Dei asked, 'Who was that boy who had put on a dotted shirt?' Dase replied 'He comes from the main branch of the Uttararay family. His name is Pratap Udit Malla Uttararay. The other comes from the Chhotray branch of the same family. His name is Pitambar Malla Chhotray. A football match was being played today. They had come over here to ask Bana and Nata to go with them to see the match.' Saraswati Dei asked, 'Won't they come to our house again?'

'Ask Bana and Nata to get them to come to our house on the pretext of going to see a match.' Dase said.

Chapter Six
End of Studies

The names of Pratap Udit, Pitambar and Natabar appeared in the gazette in the same year in the list of candidates who had passed the entrance examination. Banambar had not been able to get beyond class three. He was getting on in years. The governess came one day and said that she had taught Chandamani everything she knew and that she could teach her nothing more. Chandamani had learnt a bit of everything. Her handwriting was excellent: the letters she wrote looked like a string of pearls. The governess said that none could excel Chandamani in sewing. She could draw life-like pictures of cats and dogs. Dase found that Banambar was totally unwilling to take up a government job and that he wanted to do something on his own. Dase had inherited forty acres of land, which his family had received as a reward from the zamindar. He had, added to these, another twenty acres of rent-free, confiscated and arable land, which he bought with the money he earned during his service career. All this land he placed at Banambar's disposal. Extremely pleased with this arrangement, Banambar went off to the village to manage the farmlands. While he was still in Cuttack, his marriage with the eldest daughter of Bishu Mohanty had been fixed. The matching of horoscopes etc had all been attended to. The marriage was to be solemnized on the fifth day of the moonlit fortnight of the month of *Mesha*.

Chapter Seven
Two Young Landlords

When he passed the entrance examination, Pratap Udit Singhamalla Uttararay had already come of age. He went back to his village and took over the management of the estate. His cousin, Pitambar's father Sanatan Aridaman managed the affairs of his estate. He wanted that his young and educated son should take the management of the estate into his hands. He could then sit at home and relax, counting the holy beads. But Pitambar had other plans for his future. He was unwilling to take over as zamindar while his father was still alive. He chose to take up the job of a *peshkar* in Cuttack and lived there. This job was beneath the dignity of a young man from an aristocratic background like him. Granted, he wanted to have a job. No one would have minded if he had become a big and powerful officer. But see what a job he chose— of all things, the job of a lowly clerk. However, Pitambar's way of looking at the matter was different. He did not take up the job in order to make a living; he took one because, without some kind of routine, he would be overcome with idleness. There was another consideration, too: different classes of people who visited the cutcherry in connection with court cases would give him intimate knowledge of what was going on in the world. He was a keen student of human nature. Thirdly, he would be able to help people from his own district and others because he would always be interacting with big officials. Whatever Pitambar's motives may be, we beg to differ from him. Everything he wanted to achieve could have been accomplished through other means. Why take up a job and become a slave? He never realized that in doing so he compromised his own dignity. He was knowledgeable and intelligent. It is not that his powers of analysis

were lesser than ours. The fact is— it is matter of taste— one does not relish a dish of *palau* and opts for rice gruel instead! Of course, what Pitambar did is none of our business— but we just could not help expressing an opinion. Although Pitambar was a mere government employee, he came from a family which was highly esteemed in Cuttack. He had to live in a manner befitting his social standing. Therefore, there was no way he could not do without a *pucca* house, and a few servants. A lot of money was needed for all this— but his salary was a mere pittance. So every month, his father, Aridaman Chhotray sent him some money. Besides, *moong* and cereals of good quality, ghee and other things were regularly supplied from the village to his kitchen.

He also built up a small library, for which he had to purchase different types of books and periodicals. More money was needed for this, which was also sent by his father.

Chapter Eight
A Marriage Proposal for Chandamani

Abhyarthana bhangabhayena Sadha
Madhyasthya mistehpyabalambatethe
(*Kumar Sambhabam*)

(Afraid of being repulsed good men desist from pursuing laudable goals.)

The wedding of Das's eldest son, Banambar was to be solemnized shortly. Dase had never before given himself a break from heavy office work. He now took ten months leave and went to his village, Rukunadeipur in order to rest and revive his exhausted body.

Banambar's marriage ceremony went off without any incident. People say that marriage ceremony means conflicts: whenever a wedding takes place the parties never fail to find some cause to quarrel over. But nothing of the sort happened at the time of Banambar's marriage. Why should it? If the two families involved take care never to forget their social standing, and the conduct becoming of them, conflicts simply cannot arise. The eldest daughter-in-law came to Das's house. She belonged to a distinguished family, and her excellent upbringing showed in everything she did. Nobody could find any flaw in her nature nor in her personality. People remarked that one got a daughter-in-law like her if one was very lucky.

Dase was now not burdened with any work; he had absolutely nothing to worry about. Free from all anxieties, he relaxed at home. One afternoon, he was exchanging small talk with Saraswati Dei and Menaka Dei, seated on a rush mat in the courtyard. In course of the conversation Saraswati Dei said, 'Brother-in-law, you are now doing nothing and just sitting at home. Should you not look around

for a bridegroom for Chanda?' Dase replied, 'What's the hurry? Has Chanda become such an old maid that I have desperately to look for a match for her? Let's see how old she is— I was promoted to the position of a *nazar* on the day she was born. I can count with my fingers and tell you her exact age— fourteen years six months and seven days. Don't you find girls in our *karana* caste, who are twenty or twenty-one years old still unmarried?'

Saraswati Dei said, 'True. There may be scores of unmarried girls in our caste. But that argument does not at all appeal to me. An unmarried girl is like ghee and should not be kept too long in a house— they cause nuisance. They belong elsewhere. As the saying goes—give a daughter in marriage and live in peace. Get our daughter married because it is time she got married. Is it a good thing that girls in the *karana* caste are allowed to remain unmarried for long? Do the sastras approve of it? If a misdeed is committed by a large number of people, it is tolerated by others. Anyway, you start looking around. Who knows how many days the search for a suitable boy will take?'

Dase, 'Don't you know that ultimately everything in this matter is disposed by Lord Prajapati? He decides when the right time for a marriage has arrived: when the right time for the marriage comes, things will work themselves out. *Bibaha janma yada yachakracha yena cha.*'

Smiling, Saraswati Dei said, 'Oh, keep your book learning to yourself. Do you think Lord Prajapati goes from village to village looking for grooms for brides? You do the finding; he will then bring the boy and the girl together. Do you suppose that you will go on sleeping quietly at home and Lord Prajapati will come and wake you up?'

Menaka Dei said, 'You may do whatever you like, but the proposal has to be a good one. Otherwise I'll not give my consent to it. After all, my Chanda isn't something that the flood-waters washed up here that you'll be in a hurry to give her hand to some worthless fellow.'

Dase— Do you believe that I have done nothing yet? I've been casting my eyes wide, but there is at present no one in the *karana* caste who seems worthy of our daughter.

Saraswati— I am also keeping my eyes open. Brother-in-law, can't we enter into an alliance with a *khandayat mahanayak* family? Don't you see, several marriages between the two castes have already taken place in this area?

Dase – Yes. That's not a bad idea.

Menaka Dei did not add anything to what she had said earlier. Now she kept listening to what passed, her head bowed down. She did not utter a single word.

Chandamani was sitting at the time a short distance away. Her face turned red with embarrassment when she heard her marriage being discussed. But there was no getting away. The only way of escape lay in front of her parents. She pulled the tail and ears of her pet cat. She lost her temper with it for no reason and slapped it gently with her soft hands, which were prettier than lotus buds. The cat now stood accused of all the crimes it had committed in the past. It was reminded that it had once tresspassed into kitchen and upset the Dhaima's pot of milk. For this offence it received two slaps. That day you ate the fish, didn't you? Two slaps for this offence. Didn't you eat up the Thursday offering of rice pudding? Two more slaps and a box on the ear for this offence. The only answer the cat returned to all these charges was only 'miaow'. All its attempts to escape proved unsuccessful and it kept repeating 'miaow', which was its way of saying it was not guilty. All these slaps, boxes and tail-pulling had by now quite exasperated the cat. You stupid beast, how could you understand that a young man would have considered himself extremely lucky had he received all these loving slaps.

Dhaima was not wholly absorbed in the conversation; she watched Chandamani's movements. It was necessary to know Chandamani's reaction to the marriage proposal. Observing her a little more closely, but cautiously, Dhaima noticed that Chandamani's face and her hands were busy disciplining the cat but her ears were eager to listen to the conversation. Dhaima understood something and her face was lit up with joy. The gestures of the mute are easily figured out by his mother. It would be futile for someone else to try to make these out.

Presently the servant, Mukunda, came in and informed that the priest from the palace of Naripur had arrived. Turning to look at

Dhaima, he added, 'The gentleman, who met her a number of times in Cuttack, has come with him.' Through a movement of her eyes Dhaima motioned him not to say that again. Then she got up as if a thought had suddenly struck her, and blew a conch-shell loudly. In the mean time, Chandamani had flung the cat away and hidden behind the door. Its tail upraised, the cat made off to the backyard and licked itself clean under a drumstick tree. Then it got up, shook its body, and looked all around carefully to find out if Chandamani was on her way to catch her again. It felt very pleased with itself thinking that it had escaped the danger by using its own wits.

Dase rolled out a carpet for the guests in the front yard and welcomed them cordially and with great humility. A plate carrying betel leaves and other spices was placed before the guests, in conformity with *karana* customs. A discussion followed. Dase wanted it to be conducted in strict confidence as far as possible. No fourth person was around. Only a well-shaped nose was visible from behind the doorway. After the discussion ended, Dase handed to the white-clad Brahmin guest a piece of palmleaf, which was soaked in water mixed with turmeric. After the guests took their leave, the owner of the above-mentioned nose, Saraswati Dei, emerged smiling. Dase said, 'Saraswati, listen. Keep everything absolutely a secret for the time being.'

The next day, before daybreak, the news that negotiations were on for Chandamani's marriage with the son of Uttararay of Naripur spread throughout the village. Word soon reached other villages. Some said that the marriage had been finalized. Bhima's mother said that a lot of people had been invited to a feast on the day of the betrothal and that Bhima arrived there late. A lot of sweetmeats had been prepared for the occasion. There were at least one hundred and fifty persons present. In another village it was said that the day of the marriage had already been fixed and that the wedding would take place on the seventeenth day of the month of *Makar*. Chandamani did not stir out of the house the whole day to escape being teased by the girls of the village.

After this, people started discussing the looks and the nature of the bridegroom and the bride. Someone claimed that none in the whole area could surpass Das's daughter in beauty. Old Hari Panda,

who thought himself a master evaluator of physical beauty, made energetic gestures with his hands as if to emphasize his vast experience, and declared, 'Keep your opinions to yourself. I see the young landlord of Naripur every day. He is so handsome he puts one in mind of Lord Kartika. Your Das's daughter is not a patch on him'. But everybody seemed to agree that Lord Prajapati, like a potter, has formed the two on the same potter's wheel.

Taking some snuff, pundit Gopal Rathe sententiously observed,

'*Ratnam samagachhatu kanchenan.*' (It is like ruby set in gold)

Chapter Nine
Gelhei

Esteemed reader. Don't pull a face when you hear this name mentioned. Why do you think it sounds so terrible? Female characters in a novel should be given names such as Kamala, Padmini, Radhika, Rukmini etc. and this heroine is called Gelhei! But dear reader, you must take all things into consideration. Can't you see what a miserable state the poor author finds himself in? And to add to his troubles he has set out to write about a few rustic characters. How could he find aristocratic names for them? All right, the name sounds awful. But may be her character could be good. Oh Ram, is not it too much to expect great qualities of an ill-educated young village woman? Then why discuss her at all? The author thinks it necessary for his own safety to offer an explanation here.

First, no matter how insignificant Gelhei is as a person, she is one of the characters in this novel. Since we have undertaken to discuss the nature and person of all the characters, to neglect to describe a character because she happens to be a nobody would be patently unfair. Even so, we may yet have excluded her, but our readers are likely to meet her several times in course of the narrative. They would be in great difficulty if we don't take care to acquaint them thoroughly with her.

Secondly, everybody in the village knew Gelhei. Some liked her, some felt great affection for her, many praised her, and there were some who even treated her with reverence. Quite a few were scared of her. Whenever she thought someone guilty of improper conduct, it did not matter to her if the person was a young man or a grandfather, a young woman or a grandmother— she gave the person

such a mouthful that the person wished he or she were dead. Her words proved deadlier than blows. After this, the guilty person would never be able to hold his or her head high in the village. Taking all this into consideration the author feels that he should take care when he deals with someone like her.

Even now one's flesh creeps when one remembers the cholera epidemic, which had broken out in the village in the eleventh year of the reign of our king. More than half the population of the village perished. Gelhei's husband, Ghana Biswal, her mother-in-law, Chemi and her little son, who was only a year and a half at the time, died one after the other over three consecutive days. So scared was everyone in the village at that time that everyone's door was shut fast as soon as the dark fell. Dead bodies lay uncremated for two, three days on end and began decaying. No one dared venture out of their house; so who would take these corpses to the cremation ground? Gelhei was not even twenty years old at the time. She had never before stepped out of her house. She knew no one in the village. Who could she approach for help now? Who would come out at a time like this? It was already very dark, Gelhei was at a loss as to what she would do. The seat of goddess Brundabati was on a platform, which lay in the middle of the courtyard. From the very day she came into her mother-in-law's house, she had offered heart-felt worship to goddess Brundabati. Daily she would wash her seat with water mixed with cow dung; every evening she would light a wick there and pray for a long time, her head bowed.

She had great faith in goddess Brundabati, and she believed that the world was regulated according to the goddess's will and that the merciful goddess listened to her prayers for help. Gelhei now fixed her gaze on the face of the goddess and shed profuse tears. She paid her homage by touching the ground with her head several times and prayed long. Then she nerved herself, tied her sari-end tightly around her waist and dragged the dead bodies one after another all the way to the cremation ground. Whenever she felt scared on her way, she called out, 'Mother Brundabati, Mother Brundabati' felt and courage returning to her.

Gelhei lived alone in her house, which stood in the middle of the village. Her house comprised only two rooms. The access to the

main village path lay through a door set in a boundary wall. The smaller of the two rooms doubled as a kitchen and a dining room; the bigger one served as the bedroom. All her worldly goods— rice, winnowing baskets, a few pots and pans—were kept in a small box in this room. A husking paddle lay in a shed outside; three cows were kept tethered in another shed.

At last, the shadow of the epidemic lifted. People once more went about their lives. Gelhei kept her front door closed and busied herself with her household chores. After close of day, she would visit her neighbors and spend some time chatting with young women. When evening fell, she would light a wick in front of the seat of goddess of Brundabati, pray to her for an hour or so telling the goddess of her sorrows and joys and seek her blessing. No one ever saw her take any medicine when she fell ill. On occasions when she fell ill she would spread a sheet below the platform of goddess Brundabati, lie herself down on it and pray to the Goddess, telling her of her sufferings. It was her unshakable belief that goddess Brundabati, and no one else, ruled over the universe. This faith was her only religion; she had never been instructed in any other faith. When her husband and her mother-in-law passed away, all the money there was in the house was spent on performing the funeral rites – there was none left. But no one ever saw Gelhei at anyone's doorstep begging for help. She kept three cows. She got milk throughout the year.

She sold out most of the milk and kept a little for herself to make curd. She made curry out of the butter milk left after ghee was separated from the curd. When the ghee would amount to half a seer, she sold it. The two acres of arable land, which her father-in-law had left her, were given out to share-croppers. Every year, at the appropriate time she planted a few pumpkin and *poi* seeds in the backyard under the thatch eaves and scraped up few annas selling out homegrown fruits and vegetables. She boiled and dried unhusked paddy without taking anyone's help. She pounded it on the husking paddle alone and unassisted and separated the rice from the chaff. Her door remained always shut. She didn't want anyone to come to her house. On rare occasions someone's daughter or daughter-in-law called on her— they came only when they had some work. If a

man ever arrived at her doorstep, she replied to his enquiries staying inside her house; she would never open the door to let him in. She swept her house with a broom three times a day. One would, therefore, never find even a speck of dust anywhere in her house. No one ever saw her trim herself with ornaments. Nor did she ever groom her hair. But the sari she put on was always spotlessly clean. Rice and vegetables she did not have to buy from a shop.

The money for buying a little oil and a pinch of salt she earned from the village market by selling dried cow dung cakes. She would buy oil and salt in such quantities as would last her a month or two. When the villagers talked about her, some of them claimed that Gelhei had saved upto two, four hundred rupees. A few went so far as to believe that Gelhei's savings amounted to a thousand rupees. Gelhei was a beautiful woman. She was in the prime of her life. Besides, she was not attractive in an ordinary way. Her beauty was such that she would easily stand out in a crowd of fifty or a hundred women. Her features were so finely moulded that no one—even the most intolerant of women—could find a flaw in her person. Her complexion might not have the whiteness of a *champa* flower; one must, however, admit that she was indeed fair-complexioned. She lived all by herself. And in any village there would always be good as well as bad people. You would find them in her village, too. If any young man threw her an amorous look or spread any scandals about her, Gelhei would not lose her temper and hurl abuses at him. She would simply fix the young man with a withering look, and put the fear of god into him—and the young man would beat a hasty retreat. The eyes of chaste women radiate such a powerful glow that no man dares cast a lustful glance at them. Gelhei visited all her neighbours. If a quarrel broke out among women, she would come out and settle it. Not only did she herself not quarrel with anybody, she also did not want others to get into a quarrel. When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law fell out, both would bring the dispute before Gelhei. As for Gelhei, she always took the side of the weaker party. And no one dared disobey Gelhei for she could easily make you look ridiculous by singing out a sarcastic couplet at your expense. People were afraid of Gelhei, but she was completely without fear. She said, 'Why should I fear anyone; God's grace protects me on every side.'

Among women Gelhei was her lively, witty self; but to men she was a cold, stone-hearted person; and, for wicked people, she was no less terrifying than a she-serpent.
Gelhei had taught herself a useful skill—she was a mid-wife. It did not matter to her if her help was sought or not. The moment she came to know that a woman was in labour she would rush to her immediately. Money was never a consideration with her— in fact, she even spent her own money if the family happened to be a poor one and visited it ten times a day until the mother of the newborn was restored to health. However, elderly women in well- to-do families, whom she gave the respect due to aunts, would talk sweetly to her and press a new sari on her. Back at home, while changing, she would find a few coins tied in a fold of its end border. A rattan chest in her house was packed with new saris. If a helpless woman, who had no one to look after her, fell ill, Gelhei stayed up all night to attend to her. She knew a few country cures. For this reason, too, she commanded everyone's respect in the village. She was something to everyone— for one she was a sister, for another she was an adopted daughter. Yet another called her niece. She was aunt to someone else. Some young woman was her 'mango blossom', 'little mango', another was her *sangata*. She jokingly referred to herself as the second wife of someone's husband. Her claims of kinship were not insincere or a joking matter; she took her relationships very seriously; everyone in the village was indeed her own kith and kin. She had a white cat. She talked to it, asked it about all manner of things, and when she had nothing to do, she would quarrel with it just for fun. For her part, the cat followed her wherever she went, ate with her and slept by her side. But Gelhei had one failing. She could never stand anyone who gave himself airs.

Chapter Ten
Chandamani's Marriage

Yasytyadya shakuntaleti hrudayam samsorusta mutkanthaya
Antarbaspabharoparodhi gaditam chintayadam darshanam
Baiklabyam mama tabadidrushamho snehadaranyou kasbah
Pidyante gruhinah katham na tanaya bislesa dukheirna beih
(*Abhijnana Sakuntala*)

(Today, my heart is heavy with grief at the prospect of Shakuntala leaving for her husband's home. if a forest-dwelling hermit like me experiences such grief, how miserable parents who bring up a daughter lovingly must be feeling when they send her to her in-laws' place.)

Chandamani's marriage to Sri Sri Sri Pratapudit Malla Uttararay was soon over. Old men, eighty or ninety years of age, expressed the opinion that a wedding on such a scale had never before taken place anywhere in the world. Even in villages lying twenty or thirty miles away people kept singing the praise of the grand wedding. One admired the fireworks brought over from Cuttack and Calcutta; another marveled at the *Bilayati* illumination. Many adored the bridegroom and the bride, who, they believed, must have been divine beings, for such beauty and such virtue were denied to ordinary mortals living on the earth. There were as many as one hundred palanquins in the bridegroom's train. It was followed by a large number of elephants, horses and camels. And there were so many paiks, bonded labourers and other dependents of the zamindar in the marriage procession that an on-looker would be hard put to put a figure on them. Eight days before the day of the wedding, Dasarathi Dase had gone from door to door in the village inviting everyone.

For her part, Saraswati Dei had met the women of the village, and calling someone her mother, another, her sister, and someone else, her daughter, had entreated all of them to come to the wedding, saying 'Chanda is your daughter, please come and give us a helping hand at her wedding.' Gelhei's house remained padlocked for eight days. Saraswati Dei kept her tied, as it were, to her sari-end. Gelhei was so occupied with work she had forgotten to eat or drink. In getting work done, was there anyone who was her equal?

It was universally agreed that everything went off so smoothly only because of Saraswati and Gelhei. Dase simply sat watching, as if dazed. From the day the first ritual of the wedding was performed, all the villagers—men and women alike—flocked to Das's house. No one waited to be asked to do anything, one simply got through any task that lay before him or her. Everyone felt the wedding was their responsibility. There is a saying, 'Sweet words, not money, get things done'. Saraswati Dei's honeyed words brought everyone under her spell.

The weak financial position of Das's family was not unknown to Uttararays. One day, their *chhamukarana*, Rangadhar Pattanayak came to Rukunadeipur and talked to Dase about the marriage. The sum and substance of everything Pattnayak discussed with Dase was the following: a very large number of people were to come in the bridegroom's party. How about getting from Uttararay's palace everything that Dase would need to entertain them? Pattnayak belonged to the *karana* caste.
And he was a man, who had wide experience of the ways of the world. No one knew better than he how to put something tactfully showing due regard to family honour. Would such a person say offhand that zamindar Uttararay was openly making an offer of financial assistance? Dase made an assessment of his own financial position, and felt tempted to accept the offer. But the matter reached the ears of Saraswati Dei and she came rushing in exclaiming, 'No. No. No. That's simply out of the question.' She had inherited a few acres of land from her father and from her father-in-law. After she came to Rukunadeipur, she had sold these off with Das's help and put the money by in a box. Now she took out all the money in it and said, 'Let this be spent for someone for whom I had saved it.'

The marriage over, Saraswati Dei accompanied Chandamani to Naripur fort, riding in a palanquin sparing no thought at all for propriety or family honour. The grief of the villagers knew no bounds when Chandamani took leave of them; all of them, men and women alike, broke own and wailed loudly. It appeared as if Chandmani was dear to them as their own daughter. Needless to describe the pathetic lamentation of her own parents. For a year after the wedding, the front door of Das's house remained shut.

Chapter Eleven
Natabar's Wedding

The period of Das's leave came to an end. Das put his eldest son Banamber in charge of his household affairs and returned to Cuttack. His younger son, Natabar, accompanied him.

Natabar was now training as a *toujinabis* at the *munshikhana* in the collectorate in Cuttack. Two or three years passed. He was no longer a mere boy; he looked upon himself as a grown-up who could lead his own life. As the saying goes, his hands now could reach his head. He would go out for a stroll in the marketplace as soon as it got dark. On occasions, he returned home very late at night. If Dase ever said anything to him to show his displeasure, Natabar talked back to him. He would not obey his father at all. Whenever his father asked him to do something, he would pull a face and sulkily walk off. Das observed certain things about his son's conduct, which convinced him that it would not be safe to allow Natabar to remain unmarried for long. A few relatives also came to warn him. Could a full-blooded young man in a place like Cuttack ever be kept under restraint with the help of mere words? Dase realized that what they said was true. The search for a bride for Natabar now began. But do brides lie on the open field so that one could run out and pick one up? Ten places were contacted and for ten different reasons a match could not be made. In one instance, the family was good but the girl was not. In another, the girl was too old. In yet another, she was too young. If everything else was right about a marriage proposal, the horoscopes did not match. Dase was tired and fed up looking for a bride for his son. A year had gone by, yet nothing concrete had come up. At last, having come to the end of his patience, Dase burst out, 'Enough is enough, I'll not look around for a bride any more. I'll now accept whatever marriage proposal comes and get done with

the marriage. At last, a proposal came from the family of one Chhakadi Patnaik of village Harispur of *mouza* Asurgarh. The girl had attained marriageable age. She was about twenty years old. Her horoscope was sent for and negotiations were entered into. The astrologer drew figures on the floor, studied the two horoscopes, recited *slokas* and, in the end, putting the piece of chalk by, remarked, 'Let me tell you, Dase, only in one out of hundred or hundred fifty cases do two horoscopes match so perfectly as these two do. In eight respects the horoscopes are in harmony with each other— *ganas* of two are also in agreement. Both belong to the demon *gana*.' Bewildered, Dasarathi Das asked, 'What do you mean by the demon *gana*, sir?' 'No, No. These are terms used in the texts of astrology. If the couple share the same *gana*, they will live in perfect harmony and no quarrel will ever break out between them. Again, I find that the bride is born under the sign of the ram and that Taurus occupies the place signifying wealth. The Moon is in the ascendant, so the couple will never be without wealth even for a day. The period in life in which the Moon will be in the ascendant has already begun. Under the influence of these stars, the bride will be as fortunate as a queen. This auspicious period will commence after two months and eighteen days. At present, she is under the influence of Mercury. However, this horoscope has one major blemish. And in our profession one should never conceal whatever the horoscope reveals. Mars occupies the fifth place, and Saturn is glancing in its direction, only glancing.

Padeka drusti dashma trutiye
Dwipada drusti naba panchakeshu
Tripada drusti chaturastakeshu
Sampurnasama saptakeshu

If such a configuration occurs, the couple may be doomed to childlessness.'

Dase— Isn't there any way out of this?

Astrologer—Why should there not be a remedy? Have our sages left any problem unsolved? *Dane durgati kshaya*. A rite of expiation has to be performed on the night of the wedding. I'll give you a list of the items needed for this rite later.

Everything about the match seemed all right. The family was a good one. It belonged to the *srestha karana* caste. However, when Dase came to know that the father of the bride, Chhakadi Patnaik,

who had died four months before, worked as a *piada* for a zamindar and that he had left behind a poor widow and a young eighteen year old son, he began to have second thoughts. But Natabar, after learning everything about the bride, determined that he would marry *her* and no one else. What did it matter if she was the daughter of a poor widow? She was endowed with all auspicious qualities. She would reign like a queen. What more could one ask for? Natabar's mind was made up; he would do exactly the opposite of what his father wanted.

After all his father had no English and he himself had passed the entrance examination! He had read so many books. He was now able to understand things. His mother and the Dhaima wanted to send a messenger to have a look at the bride. But Natabar would have none of this for he was afraid that something might go wrong. It was decided that the marriage would take place in the dark fortnight of the month of *Mesha*.

Although the expenses incurred for the marriage of Banambar and Chandamani had broken Das's back, Natabara's marriage could not be put off. A marriage, if held in the village, would be an expensive affair. The relatives had to be invited for the occasion. And there was no question of excluding any one in the village. But one did not have to worry about this in a place elsewhere— there a simple wedding would do. So Dase took a house in Tulsipur in Cuttack on rent for a month. His wife Menaka Dei, his eldest son, Banambar, and his eldest daughter-in-law came from the village. Dhaima, Saraswati Dei came from Naripur fort. Now the question was who would meet the expenses of entertaining the bridegroom's party if Natabara went to village Asurgarh for his marriage. The mother of the bride was so poor she did not have enough even to feed herself. But so what? After all, she belonged to the *karana* caste. How could she ask for bride price? She took only fifty rupees for decorating her house and for the ritual of change of cooking pots.

The marriage took place in Cuttack at an auspicious hour. The father-in-law and the mother-in-law give their daughter-in-law a gift of money or ornaments at the time of the game of cowries and for the ritual of seeing her face. Dase gave five rupees and his wife made a gift of a gold necklace for having a glimpse of their daughter-in-law's face.

Chapter Twelve
Sri Sri Sri Pratapa Udit Malla Uttararay

The way the new zamindar Sri Sri Pratap Udit Malla managed the affairs of the zamindari made his tenants extremely happy. They said that luck smiled on them— they would now be as happy as the subjects of Lord Rama, the king of Ayodhya. True, the predecessors of Uttararay had never oppressed their subjects. But gambling, *bentibula*, listening to rival *pala* singers had kept them occupied. How could they find the time to attend to the petitions of their tenants? But the new zamindar settled every case after examining it thoroughly, and paying it close personal attention. It was not that he did not trust his record-keepers and his *patwaris*. Nevertheless, he never felt satisfied unless he supervised everything personally. Earlier, the record-keepers had several sources of income apart from their salary. But the new zamindar abolished all these, and increased their salary. This decision pleased tenants and record-keepers alike. Uttararay toured all the villages in his zamindari and came to feel that his estate was really attractive. Every year, the floodwaters of river Mahanadi flowed into the estate through two canals and deposited their silt. For this reason, the land was very fertile and yielded several crops a year. He collected information about the productivity of the soil in other countries by reading books in English. By comparing the land of his own country with that of countries such as Japan, England and America, he came to the conclusion that the former was more fertile than the latter. His tenants would not have to go to great expenses or adopt scientific methods in order to enhance the fertility of their land; in many cases, it was even unnecessary to do so. But, in spite of this, in comparison with the peasants of these countries, the peasants of Utkal were poor and miserable. Many tenants did not

have enough grain even for cooking two meals a day. For Uttararay the reasons for such poverty were the following:

First — ignorance and poverty of the tenants

Second —lack of sympathy from the landlord and men of means

Third — the fact that farmers were the source of all prosperity in a country was something the educated classes had not realized yet

Fourth — it had not dawned on people here, as it had in a country like America, that farming was a profession one should be proud of. Both tenants and landlords in civilized nations benefit when they are instructed in newly discovered techniques of raising profitable crops. Poverty was a major obstacle in the tenants' path to prosperity. Although the tenants knew that, in order to reap a rich harvest, they ought to manure their fields properly they could not do so on account of their poverty. Whatever little the tenants got after overcoming these obstacles went to the moneylender in the form of interest on the loan he had advanced to them. If men of substance and wise persons did not exert themselves, misery and poverty would never come to an end among the lower classes, or classes living at the bottom of society.

Uttararay made a tour of the villages and observed the condition of his tenants, listened to their grievances, and gave them advice as to how they could better their lot.

Now that he advanced to them loans at a very low interest, the tenants escaped the clutches of moneylenders. Again, they were now able to take the plough to the fields because they obtained loans on easy terms at the right time when they needed these.

In the past, the tenants used to make a beeline to Cuttack to fight their court cases in law courts. These days, however, they came to Uttararay's *sudder* cutcherry instead. Their disputes were settled in a very short time. So what was the point in spending a lot of money going to a far-off place and getting into all sorts of trouble. There was no need to consult lawyers and *muktars*. No need to arrange false witnesses either. The dispute was settled without any difficulty. Poor people took *prasad* at the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore, and went home after getting their disputes sorted out.

The situation inside the palace underwent a remarkable change under the new zamindar, too. The palace consisted of two wings. In

the large buildings of the first wing lived the zamindar Uttararay himself and his wife. The kitchen, the granary, the pantry and the prayer-room, the bedroom, the room where the zamindar received his visitors, the massage-room lay in this wing. Two rooms for the new zamindar and his wife were added to this wing. These were called reading-rooms. Two large buildings meant for the Dhaima also belonged to this wing. The second wing contained several small rooms fitted with small windows, which looked like pigeonholes. Each of these housed a maidservant. Here lived maidservants, old and young, who had served three generations of Uttararays. In addition, there were others who were recently employed to wait upon the new zamindar. Many widowed women from respectable *brahmin*, *karan*, *khandayat* families, who had no one to support them, women who would starve themselves to death rather than step out of their homes, were given shelter here by the Uttararays. This wing was full of dirt and disputes; in front of every room stood a heap of garbage. Whenever two women got into a quarrel, several others would arrive to take sides. Someone would encourage the combatants. Another would try to calm them down. The quarrel did not come to a stop until the two combatants fell to the ground, utterly exhausted.

If ever you feel the need for having a few quarrels at home, keep a few maidservants and you will have quarrels to your heart's content. These days, however, no maidservant dared open her mouth out of fear for Dhaima. The wing was swept spotlessly clean every day, and all the garbage was deposited in the backyard. But let me assure you, endless chattering of maidservants without work and ceaseless twittering in the nests of sparrows dangling from palm trees is a law decreed by the creator— this will go on for all eternity. No one could ever put a stop to this at one go.

Under the new dispensation, on the day after every *sankranti*, the store-keeper measured out to each woman her share of rice. In addition to this, the women regularly received some amount of ready cash from the *sudder* cutcherry towards what was called their betel-money. Payment of this amount was also punctually made on the day after every *sankranti*. True, this system was in vogue in the past; however, no one at the time took care to check if the money was paid to every one, if someone got left out or if someone received it once

in three or four months. This used to create a great deal of confusion and conflict. These days, however, no one had any cause for complaint.

No one saw the young zamindar outside the palace one or two hours before sunset. His wife could read and write— she had learned quite a lot through discussions. After devoting two hours to their studies, the zamindar and his wife went out for a stroll in the Panchabati orchard, which lay at the back of the palace. Why this orchard was given the name Panchabati, the records give us no clue. People say that this orchard occupied five *bati*s of land. Hence it was called Panchabati.

The Uttararay couple enjoyed heavenly bliss. It is not entirely unlikely that the happiness and prosperity of Chandamani might arouse feelings of envy in some readers of the fair sex. But they should remember that possession of extensive territories or immense wealth may not afford one true happiness. If any real source of happiness ever exists in this world, which is a vale of sorrow, it lies only in conjugal love. There are of course several sources of human happiness and prosperity such as wealth, learning and fame. But these are but things of no consequence at all compared with unalloyed conjugal bliss. Different classes of people are entitled to different kinds of happiness, but the divine felicity of conjugal love is within the reach of everyone— from a humble cottager to an emperor alike. It is as if human life, lying crushed under a heavy burden of sorrows, has achieved this boon from the creator after penance long and hard. In the absence of conjugal love, human life in this world would have been deprived of a blissful and heavenly experience. The union between male and female principles has created and sustained this world. We may come across many instances where beauty, lust and wealth have brought men and women together. But such a union does not deserve the name of conjugal love, for this is based on self-interest. Selfless conjugal love is a thing apart; it lasts forever. Even if one partner dies, he is kept alive in the heart of the other until her death. A union based on infatuation born of physical attraction only and caused by the ardour of youth also cannot be described as conjugal love. True conjugal love obtains only when one heart reflects the qualities of another and sacrifices its self-interest to ensure the

happiness of the other— it is a sacrifice of self-love in the interest of mutual happiness. The joy of this conjugal love knows no bounds, and it is immortal. At the same time, conjugal love is subject to a discipline. The husband loves his wife because she is his wife. The wife is the light of love in his eyes, his inseparable shadow. For the wife, the husband is her God, her place of shelter— the chief source of all her happiness. But the love they feel for each other is inspired by no hope of gain; it comes naturally to them. A chaste wife offers her devotion to her husband not out of a sense of duty, but loves him, surrendering her heart and her mind. She knows only that her husband deserves to be worshipped. The husband, for his part, feels that his wife is the lifeblood that flows through his veins. The Uttararay couple were bound together by the strongest ties of conjugal affection. For this reason they enjoyed pure, unlimited bliss.

Every day, in the evening, the zamindar, Uttararay, and his wife, Chandamani Dei spent an hour talking to each other on the big pucca ghat. One day, while they were thus engaged in conversation, a maidservant arrived, and, said with folded hands, 'Dhaima wants to know if her highness has kept the gold necklace, which the baby had put on?'

Chandamani said, 'Yes' and the maidservant went off. Uttararay said, ' This reminds me of something interesting. I wanted to ask you about this, but I kept forgetting to do so. Tell me, who is this Dhaima of yours? Her looks, the way she speaks, her deportment— all indicate that she hails from a respectable family. Could a mere maidservant possess such looks? Such grace, such wisdom and such sense of fair play are beyond the reach of the class to which maidservants belong. I notice that Dhaima is indifferent to her own well-being, but remains completely engrossed in housework. She is expert at giving good advice. Truly, when I see her, I'm reminded of my own mother.' His wife said, 'You are right. Dhaima is no maidservant; she is my mother's cousin—the daughter of her uncle. She is, therefore, my aunt. I call her Dhaima because she brought me up from childhood. My uncle, her husband, was doing a job in Calcutta. There is no news of him for several years now. Since she had no other relatives, she sold off all her land and came to live with us in village Rukunadeipur. She had a lot of money. But she spent it

all on my marriage. In *karana* families, no aunt ever accompanies her niece to her father-in-law's house. People said many things when Dhaima came here to live with me. But she said, 'My life is where my Chanda is! She didn't listen to anything anyone said and came here.' From that time onwards, Uttararay called Saraswati Dei 'mother' and treated her with the respect due to his own mother. Everything in the palace was left to her care. Even on cases and disputes taking place outside the palace, the Uttararay did not take any decision without first consulting Dhaima.

Dhaima offered good advice on all important matters. Not only the people inside the palace, the record-keepers and the *patwari*s, too, depended on her.

Chapter Thirteen
Natabara, the *Nazar*

Dasarathi Das had put in many years of service as a *nazar*. The time for him to retire on a pension had now arrived. He had got into debt to meet the expenses involved in the marriages of his daughter and his sons. This had not yet been repaid. So he wanted to remain in service for an extra year or two. But a human being's wishes and God's plans for him do not always coincide. Two months after Natabara's wedding Dase began to suffer from what seemed coughing fits. Doctors and *vaidyas* examined him and told him that he was no longer fit for strenuous, hard work, and that he needed to go elsewhere for a change of air. Dase acquainted the sahib with his predicament and got Natabara employed as a *nazar* in his own place. The sahib felt a little sad when he came to know of the condition of such an old and trusted employee. In fact, among officers we do come across many who are really kind-hearted. They are exceedingly generous to employees, who are loyal to them. The sahib gave Natabara the job because he came to know of Das's debts. After taking retirement, Dase went straight to his village— only Natabara now remained in the rented house at Cuttack. Natabar thought that he had already become a quite important officer. He had quite a few orderlies and peons around to take orders from him. He received a salary, of course. In addition, ready cash from some other sources daily came into his hands. Money and power—potent intoxicants, both—began to make his head turn. He came to the conclusion that he owed his prosperity to his wife's stars. 'The astrologer had correctly predicted that my wife would reign like a queen. No sooner had she stepped into the house than I have come by so much money. Astrology is truly a wonderful science. See how the astrologer could make such a correct prediction not so long ago?' he thought to himself.

It was Natabara's firm, unshakeable belief that making money and hoarding it was the only goal of human life. And money is made by clever people. Other people worship them. Money does not fall like the rains from the skies; one has to snatch it away from others by using one's wits. Religious scruples are merely the talk of stupid and idle persons. It is seen everywhere that people greedy for money adore that which brings them wealth. Natabara Das concluded that it was the arrival of his wife that had made him so wealthy. She augured very well for him. So his heart overflowed with love for her.

Chapter Fourteen
Death of Dasrathi Das

Jatasya hi dhrubo mrityu
Dhrub janma mrutasya cha

(*The Gita*)

(Everyone who is born must die and everyone who dies must be reborn.)

Dasarathi Dase now stayed in his own village Rukunadeipur. His illness became more serious with each passing day. Two experienced *vaidyas* treated him, consulting their texts; but soon they accepted defeat. Das's son-in-law, Uttararay and his daughter Chandamani kept themselves constantly informed of his condition. Uttararay instructed his court physician Bidyadhar Kabi Siromani Dhanvantari to be in constant attendance at Rukunadeipur.

No matter who prescribed them, many costly medicines were brought over from Calcutta or wherever they were available. At last the court physician, Dhanvantari decided against keeping the condition of the patient a secret any longer. He declared that it was beyond the power of even Lord Siva to find a cure for this disease. Tuberculosis allowed its victim to live for only a thousand days. The moon god himself was once afflicted with this disease. Even Aswani Kumar, the divine physician, had failed to cure him. What chance then did a poor human physician stand?

Menaka Dei and her elder daughter-in-law took turns to attend upon the patient. One or the other had to forget all about her food and drink, and keep constantly massaging the patient's limbs; otherwise he would suffer from acute pain. As soon as dark fell, the younger daughter-in-law would complain of headache, and she would

retire to bed. Her mother-in-law cooked dinner, and with much difficulty woke her up, and got her to eat a little. Luckily for the younger daughter-in-law, her headache never caused any loss of appetite. She would not bother to clear away the dish from which she ate. Her mother-in-law or her sister-in-law washed it every morning. Her mother-in-law would say, 'Don't tell her anything. After all, she is a mere child. She will do everything when she grows up.'

Das's condition grew critical. He now vomited blood. There was no hope left. Saraswati Dei came from Naripur fort. Dase breathed his last.

Natabara Das took leave and came from Cuttack to his village to perform the last rites for his father. Banambar made a living from managing his landed property; for him, therefore, ready cash was hard to come by. However, he arranged everything needed for the funeral feast. The last rites were performed in a manner befitting the status of the family. Natabara Das claimed that he got into debt on account of the funeral. But, of course, there are liars and envious people everywhere. Such people in the village expressed their doubt in whispers saying, 'The elder son had arranged everything in advance. And, again, from Naripur fort had come many things including ready cash for gifts to be made to the Brahmins. It was likely that not all these could be spent. How come Natabara Das run into debt? Did he during this time get several gold ornaments made for his wife?'

Chapter Fifteen

The *Nazar* Couple Leave for Cuttack

The funeral was over. Since the *nazar*'s leave came to an end, arrangements were made for his departure to Cuttack. He noticed that, from the day he arrived from Cuttack, his wife never seemed happy; she always pulled a long face. Since the *nazar* baboo remained busy, he had not found the time to discover the reason for this. Now, when he went to take leave of his wife before setting off for Cuttack, she first went into a sulk, then set up a loud wail. She made it known that she must accompany him to Cuttack. If her husband did not take her with him, she would strangle herself to death with a rope. She listed all the miseries she had to put up with in the house one by one before her husband and vividly described them. She said that her mother-in-law did not like her and scolded and abused her for no reason at all. And the one whom her husband called his brother never opened his mouth to contradict his mother. That wicked sister-in-law would never be nice to her nor would she let any one in the village be friends with her.

'And I need not tell you about the terrible food I get to eat here. In the morning as well as in the evening I am given only two meals of coarse rice with little or no curry. Every month you send lots of money for my upkeep. But this they keep hidden from me, and they tell everyone around that you don't send even a paise home. What can I do? To whom could I complain? All I could do is to lie here, starving. Forget what has happened to me. Your face has grown pale. Your comely figure has lost its shine. Who is there at Cuttack to look after you, to see if you have eaten or not? If I go there I will cook many dishes for you every day. Who will nurse you when you take ill if I am not with you? You are my God, you are my deity. Here I

swear by touching your head – I'll hang myself from the end of a rope and commit suicide.' She wailed.

The *nazar* felt terribly upset. He thought to himself, 'After all, who else is so close to me? I have now plenty of money to eat and to spend. May be there are others to look after me at Cuttack; but who could compare with my wife? All my influence and power, my wealth came my way only on account of her. Since the day she married me, gold and money have come flooding into my house. Luck has been smiling on me since the day I took her as my wedded wife. She has sworn by touching my head that she'll commit suicide if I did not take her to Cuttack. Oh Ram! Oh Ram! Oh Ram! I'll be undone'. He now made up his mind to take her with him. He communicated this decision to everyone at home. On hearing this, his mother sat, as if stunned. As for his elder brother, he could not open his mouth, as the matter was a delicate one. After all, it concerned his younger brother's wife. Dhaima came rushing in and said, 'What is all this, Nata? You will take your wife to Cuttack? She is but a child. How will she manage in a town like Cuttack?'

The *nazar* said, 'I know how fond of your daughter-in-law you are! None of you would even bother to find out if she has taken her food. Day and night she toils without rest. When she falls ill no one cares to massage her limbs.'

The way the younger daughter-in-law conducted herself had put Dhaima off earlier. Now she protested, 'What are you saying, Nata? All the housework is done by your mother and the elder daughter-in-law. Your wife does not so much as split a piece of straw. Her mother has taught her such manners that she would leave the rice bowl from which she eats lying unwashed from one evening to the next. And what did you say? Her mother-in-law and her elder sister-in-law would massage her legs? She must be thinking she is a royal personage? You talk as if her father had employed five maidservants to wait upon her mother, as if her mother lay relaxing on a soft bed all day and all night!' The *nazar*'s wife set up a piercing loud wail and complained, 'Listen to her, she is abusing my parents in front of you, and in front of others. If I have done something wrong, beat me with a broomstick, kill me. Um-um-um (she whined) I will kill myself...Tonight I'll hang myself from the end of a rope.

If you go to Cuttack and leave me behind, I'll put a rope round my neck.' (She continued snivelling). Natabar said, 'It is true. If my mother could insult my wife like this in my presence, what terrible things they must be doing in my absence? You dare abuse my Lakshmi, my goddess of wealth? Who are you? You live shamelessly in someone else's house? And you have the face to talk to me like this?' Dhaima's head reeled. She slumped on the floor, as if dazed. His sister, Menaka Dei, rushed in and taking her by the hand, said, 'Come Saraswati, come. Let him do whatever he likes. How are we concerned?' Banambar and his wife burst into tears. Drawn by the fracas in Das's house a few village women came to eavesdrop.

Next morning, at the bathing ghat of the pond lying in the middle of the village, many village women, young and old, married and unmarried, who included the elder daughter-in-law of the Chhamukaran family, Makra's mother, Chumki apa, Saria, Gelhei, Chemi's husband's sister, Kausuli and Pari. They were all busy talking.

Chhamukaran's daughter-in-law said, 'What can I say, sister Champi? Things like honour and dignity now mean nothing at all. The sinful *Kaliyug* is approaching fast. I myself dared not utter a word in front of my mother-in-law until I became the mother of two children. I spoke only in whispers. If we ran out of rice at home I would merely hold up the empty basket and kick the earth as if I was pounding rice. If dirty clothes had to be sent to the washerman, I would simply make a hissing noise and pound the clothes against the ground like a washerman. At night, only after every one including the cat went to bed, I would tiptoe into the room where my husband slept. And look at what she is doing—quarrelling with her mother-in-law and her sister-in-law! In broad daylight the husband and the wife sit in a room talking to each other. Who cares if the door is wide open?'

Champi apa – Was it an ordinary quarrel? It filled the whole village with noise. The prestige of the *karana* caste is lost forever. To this day people keep talking about the incident, which took place in Patnaik's family so long ago. But compared with this, that was nothing.

Makra's mother – Champi apa, do tell me what happened in Patnaik's family?

Champi apa – 'It is like this. One day Patnaik's daughter-in-law lay asleep. Her mother-in-law woke her up and asked her to have her meal. The daughter-in-law was still feeling sleepy. She shook her mother-in-law's hand off, and said ' No. I won't eat.' Now, having done this how could she escape? The mother-in-law made such a scene that other women in the village came rushing into the house. The daughter-in-law forgot all about sleeping or eating; she hid herself behind a door and wailed loudly. Her father in law's brother's wife ran to her rescue. She gave the mother-in-law a piece of her mind. 'Have you forgotten what you yourself were like? The child said something in her sleep. And you have taken such exception to that? Have you forgotten what mistakes you yourself made?'

The witch has become the witch doctor and chants spells
The thief has turned into a policeman.
This snub silenced the mother-in-law and she beat a hasty retreat.

Gelhei sang—
See the ways of the karana daughter-in-law
Her face is covered with a cubit-long veil.
Kausuli – Yes, Champi apa. What mistake her mother-in-law had committed?
Champi apa – The thing is, when they feel hungry, the daughters-in-law may open and shut their mouths in front of their mothers-in-law, but only from behind a veil. This mother-in-law, when she was herself a newly wed, used to silently open and shut her mouth in front of her mother-in-law, with only her nose visible. This is what her elder daughter-in-law reminded her of. As for our *nazar*'s wife— she'd give her mother-in-law a mouthful if there was a minute's delay in serving her soaked rice.

Chhamukaran's daughter-in-law bit her tongue and exclaimed, 'What are you saying? Was this woman born into the *karana* caste or into the caste of *kela*s? If eatables are ever brought into our house, I'd eat a few in the backyard out of everyone's sight. Can I ever eat anything in my mother-in-law's presence? I would shake my head even if she offered me something to eat. Let me tell you, this is how *karana* women ought to maintain the honour of their caste.'

Gelhei listened to all this while cleaning her teeth, sitting waist-deep in the water. She scraped her tongue, and spat out a mouthful of water and sang out—

The daughter of a rich man,
My moon-faced daughter-in-law
Never eats anything,
Three bowls of soaked rice she swallows
Still her face looks sallow

Pari— We have heard about her nature. Let's now consider her looks. Isn't she a conceited woman? If someone paid a visit to her house, she would hurriedly put on a *pata* sar to give one an idea of her importance.

Gelhei— *Her belly is larger than a cooking pot*
And her silk sari flutters in the wind
Her ink-black body drips with perfumed oil.

Kausuli asked, 'Have you noticed how she walks with her silver anklets on? She walks as if no one else in this whole area had seen what a silver anklet is like.'

Gelhei— *As you walk*
Your anklets make clinking noise
Reminding one of a bear slouching towards an anthill.

Laughing, Kausuli asked, ' Have you seen her nose jewel?'

Gelhei— *A pearl adorns a flat nose*
And a straight nose is bare
A full head of hair lies dishevelled
A balding woman is busy combing her hair.

Pari – Tell me, sister Gelhei, why does this daughter-in-law keep her left hand always covered?

Gelhei laughed heartily and replied, 'Listen, Pari. Can a pregnant woman hide her condition from a midwife, of all people? Yesterday, in the evening, I paid a visit to Das's house. I thought to myself I should have a little talk with the new daughter-in-law. I went up to her and sat down quietly by her side. But, my sister, forget about her talking to me; she pulled a very long face the moment she saw me. I thought to myself, "Fine, it's all right if she did not talk to me. Since I have come to see her, let me spend a little while sitting by her side.' I noticed that she kept her left hand always covered. I wondered why she was doing this. All right. Let her do as she liked. Then I hit upon

an idea. I moved closer, jumped to my feet and slapped her covered hand shouting, "A scorpion, a scorpion". The saree-end covering the hand slipped off. I glanced sideways at the uncovered hand, and ran out of the room. Then I stamped the floor twice as if I was crushing a scorpion underfoot. Bana baboo stood outside the room. So she could not come out. O my Pari, How can I describe what I saw?

A peacock-shaped jewel adorns her flat nose and two of her teeth jut out
Her small eyes blink and her left hand is deformed.

Patnaik's daughter-in-law— day and night she ceaselessly munches betel leaves like a goat. Does this look nice in a *karana* family?'

Gelhei:

Her mouth, like a goat's, works without stop.
Munching betel leaves.
She spits out betel-juice
Her teeth are misshapen.

Again, listen to this:

Her pock-marked face
Is shaped like a round plate.
When she opens her mouth to speak
It seems as if a jackal has set up a howl.

Suddenly Bhima's mother looked around cautiously and whispered something into the ears of Hagura's mother.

Gelhei sang— *Why whisper when the whole village knows the story*
The pond is choked with weed
And cow dung lies on the bathing ghat.

Old Sankara arrived, carrying her granddaughter in her arms and chewing the end of a twig. The old woman was treated with much respect by the village women. So everyone stopped talking and fell silent. She enquired, 'What were you all talking about?' Pari replied, evasively, 'We were talking about a daughter-in-law living in some other village.'

Old woman Sankara said, ' I know what you are discussing. Don't do it. What will the Das family think?'

Gelhei— *Stop talking for the saantani comes rushing in here*
She will cut your noses off if she loses her temper.

Everyone burst into laughter and went off to their homes.

Chapter Sixteen
Chitrakala

Before the *nazar* brought his wife over to his Cuttack residence, he had employed a boy, who cooked for him and a maidservant, whose name was Chitrakala. Only people who were familiar with the *nazar* household knew that she was a maidservant. But, if a stranger arrived, he would mistake her for the lady of the house and address her as such. He should not be blamed. The way Chitrakala dressed herself, the ornaments she wore, the winning manner in which she carried herself, and the assurance with which she talked were such that no one could take her for a maidservant. *Nazar* Natabar Das had told his friends and relatives that this woman lived at his residence to do household chores. On the authority of what he had said, this author has gathered that she was a maidservant. At the time we are treating of, that is during Chitrakala's hey-day, no one took exception to such things— many young maidservants lived in good *karana* and *khandayat* families. However, since the time educated people have discovered a new thing called 'virtue', many of these maidservants are no longer provided for and lost their places in good families which used to support them—Anyway, if we had not heard it from the *nazar* himself we would not have to call Chitrakala a maidservant. She might be a maidservant— but she was beautiful to look at. Her complexion did not have the whiteness of a champak flower; it was somewhat dark. Her face was beautifully shaped, though, and its beauty— or what may be called in poetic idiom, grace— made itself more visible because Chitrakala rubbed it six times every day. If, after parting her hair carefully in front of a big mirror, she gave a sidelong glance with her liquid kohl-adorned eyes, many would stop to cast a glance at her. One more thing— the method

followed by authors for describing the beauty of their heroines cannot be followed by this author, for his heroine is:

Rupa jauban sampanna
Ajnatakulasambhaba
Apangabilolanetra lokachittanuranjani

(Beautiful and in the prime of life this girl of unknown parentage the hearts of men ensnares with her amorous sidelong glances.)

Describing the beauty of such women according to classical norms is beyond this author's powers. However, it is possible that a hard-hearted reader, who feels no sympathy for the author, who is caught in such a terrible dilemma, may call him a stupid fellow because he does not know how to depict the heroine of his novel. But let me tell you, every man has faith in his own intelligence; in other words, every man believes that he is knowledgeable. Many kinds of abuse we find bearable; but the charge of stupidity causes us pain. So, in view of all this, the author has decided, in deference to classical norms, and for self-protection, to describe in brief Chitrakala's beauty so that no one will have any matter for complaint. O dear reader, and you lady reader who reads this, pay attention, for we are now going to describe Chitrakala's beauty.
We say—

Atasikusumashyama gandhatailanuranjita
Bastramkarsarbaswa bipanibartma bartini.

(Her complexion like the colour of atasi flowers /Anointed with sweet-smelling unguents/ Dressed in colourful robes/ The temptress walks down the lane.)

Chapter Seventeen
The *Nazar*'s Conjugal life

The *nazar* couple now lived very happily in Cuttack. They loved each other deeply. In their life, there was an abundance of everything they desired. In Hindu households the discipline imposed by elders is an obstacle in the way to free, unrestrained enjoyment of life – in this case, however that obstacle had been left far behind. You may, if you wish, call the affection, which united these two (the *nazar* and his wife), conjugal love. Deep love does not unite only a man and a woman; it may well exist between a man and a man, a woman and another woman. In this world, no one is born as our friend or as our foe. One who helps us in achieving what we desire is called a friend; one who obstructs us is called an enemy. Except in some horrible, ignorant families, everywhere the needs of mundane life are such that they cannot be fulfilled in other way than through co-operation between men and women. And all these needs cannot be ignored. The needs form the basis of a particular kind of love. The author picked up the courage to write this, because he has observed at first hand the nature of conjugal love among different types of couples in many different families.

Without exception every human being desires happiness: and the objects of his happiness— wealth, piety, learning, fame, the lime-light of publicity, popularity— differ depending on his taste and temperament. There are also those who look upon taking intoxicants or indulgence of perverted senses as a source of supreme happiness. Anyone who assists them with obtaining such pleasures is considered a friend.

Natabar baboo believed that making money is the only goal of human life. With the help of money, everything in the world can be

acquired. And money is the only means of achieving happiness. He had firm faith in the astrologer's prediction. Why should anyone disbelieve something that was so obvious? His wife was born under auspicious signs. After her arrival in his life, more and more wealth, higher position, greater prosperity kept coming his way. For this reason, the *nazar* became exceedingly fond of his wife. As for his wife, she was the daughter of a man who was desperately poor and a complete stranger to luxury, and she had lived in a broken-down hut. The sudden acquisition of wealth and importance had made her forget herself and turned her head. She persuaded herself that she had achieved the status of the queen described in fairy tales. This royal status had been brought within her reach by her husband. She must therefore love him. Is this what sacred conjugal love is like? Love between man and woman, which is inspired by calculation, which conceals base passions, and which is artificial and not based on genuine trust, never deserves to be called holy conjugal love.

Chapter Eighteen
Rivals

Prayena samagrebidho gunanam
Parangukhi viswasrujah prabruth
(*Kumar Sambhabam)*
(The creator never endows any being with perfection.)

It seems as if fate has decreed against the possibility of human beings enjoying unalloyed bliss. You may consider somebody absolutely happy, but close scrutiny will reveal to you that his life is not unclouded; somewhere in some corner floats a little cloud of sorrow. Our nazar's wife was enjoying unbounded happiness. But suddenly something gave her cause for anxiety. A shadow of jealousy fell across her mind when she noticed the frequency with which Chitrakala visited her residence, even when she was not sent for. A poet may have described the state of her mind in the following words:

Darkness filled her heart
And her face grew pale.

Chitrakala was a pretty woman. She put on fine clothes. Her jewels looked nice on her—regular polishing made them glitter. The author is unable to verify the truth of the statement that a beautiful woman can never bear someone praising the beauty of another woman. It is said that the famous queen of England, Elizabeth prided herself on her beauty. When the beauty of another woman was acclaimed everywhere, the jealous queen got her rival killed in secret. To hear of the plain looks of the great queen Ahalyabai, who deserves to be remembered with respect every morning, brought great pleasure to her rival, the queen of Maharastra. The *nazar*'s wife must have been convinced that she was beautiful, for she looked into the mirror ten times a day. She used a horn comb to groom her scanty hair. She

never forgets to check out from time to time, if her somewhat thick hanging under lip had been sufficiently reddened by betel juice. It was but natural for a woman like her to find Chitrakala's beauty unpleasant. And a smiling Chitrakala would talk to her husband outside the house. This she certainly found unbearable. The right to laugh with her husband, the *nazar*, and to talk to him belonged only to her. No other young woman outside the family possessed this right. The wife may not be a good woman, she may not love her husband— these considerations were of no account, but she would never grant another attractive young woman the right to talk to her husband. The *nazar*'s wife felt very unhappy. She sat pulling a long face. Normally she shouted orders at her servants even when there were no needs to do so, but she now sat quietly. Nothing seemed to interest her; that horrible woman, Chitrakala's face kept dancing before her eyes. She thought of her when she was awake; and she dreamt of her when asleep. She no longer laughed and lovingly talked to her husband as she did before. What would she do now? Would always brooding over this make her lose her mind? She didn't express what she felt and no one could guess what was wrong with her. Who knew what would happen if she told her husband everything? She felt scared. Sometimes her doubts took different forms. She summoned all her thoughts from her mind's warehouse and set them to work. Who is this woman? Why does she come to our house so frequently? Do people in this town visit others' homes in this manner? Ours is of course the residence of a big officer. It is but natural that many people should visit us. How could I find out what the matter is? I can't ask the *nazar*. He may feel bad. What will he think? One ought to take all things into consideration and find a way out.

As for Chitrakala, she could figure out what was passing through her mistress's mind. In cleverness even the *nazar* was no match for Chitrakala. Who cares for his silly wife? Chitra knew that she could easily sell this woman six times in a market and buy her back without her finding out about it. She decided also that this monkey-face needed to be kept tethered. Otherwise she might sometimes bite and scratch. She was reminded of a couplet:

With the help of money, wit and service there is nothing one
cannot achieve under the sun.

Now Chitra called the *nazar*'s wife, 'Your Excellency', 'Your Highness' ten times a day even when she had no work with her. In the evening, if she found her mistress sitting, she would say 'Your Excellency's tender feet must be aching', and placing them on her own soft shapely thighs, massage them. All this pleased the *nazar*'s wife to no end, but the nagging suspicion that had found its way into her mind could not be dispelled easily.

One morning, an orderly of the *nazar khana* brought vegetables from the market to the *nazar*'s house. Chitrakala was present in the house at the time. She exclaimed, 'My lady, do these vegetables cost four annas? Give me four pice and see how much vegetable I buy with these!' To give her a chance to prove her claim, the *nazar*'s wife handed her four pice. The vegetables which Chitra brought in were much larger in quantity than those the orderly had got, and were of much better quality. Seeing this, the *nazar*'s wife bit her tongue. Using her wits, she arrived at the conclusion that Chitra was trustworthy and clever, and that orderly was either a thief or a fool. From that day on, buying everything for the *nazar*'s house was left to Chitrakala's care. The *nazar*'s wife was, above everything else, a strict housewife. To her, every paisa was precious, like a drop of her own blood. Litigants brought gifts of vegetables, fish, curd and milk in large quantities to the *nazar*'s house. His wife would let whatever could not be used at home rot and threw it to the rubbish heap at the back of the house rather than offer anyone else even a single rotten brinjal. Such an attitude met with the *nazar*'s approval. The two, therefore, lived in perfect harmony.

Everything went well. But the real problem remained still unresolved. Whenever Chitra, all smiles, gossipped with the *nazar*, something made his wife wince. A few days passed in this manner, blending trust with mistrust, happiness with despair. Chitra remained watchful. Never make light of the power of enmity and illness: the moment they find an opportunity they will overwhelm you. One day, when the *nazar* finished his supper after coming back home from the cutcherry, Chitrakala promptly rolled out a rush mat on the terrace. He seated himself upon it and smoked his hookah, making a spluttering noise. Jets of betel juice discharged from his wife's mouth fell at the edge of the rush mat. Chitrakala carefully laid out quantities

of betel leaves and tobacco by their side and went home. After exchanging a few words with his wife on various topics, the *nazar* cleared his throat and said, "Do you know who this Chitrakala is? She is the daughter-in-law of a very rich family. Every member of that family except her has died. She has no one to support her. She now depends on us. She owns a lot of money and gold, a huge pucca house; her large orchard is guarded by two watchmen. She is going to make all this over to us. That has been arranged. I'll take you one day in a *buggy* and show you the pucca house and the orchard. After all, you will become the owner of all this shortly. This is why I allow her to come to our residence. I keep her in good humour. I do all this because, otherwise, she might give all these to someone else."

The mention of the money and the gold, and the big pucca house made the *nazar*'s wife's head swim. The shadow which had darkened her mind suddenly lifted. Chitrakala's company was now as congenial to her as castor oil is to a sheep's coat. If there was a moment's delay in Chitrakala's coming to her house, she sent for her. No discord existed between them; they were now one soul, inseparable. The reason for this new-found attachment: on the part of *nazar*'s wife the pipe dream of obtaining immense wealth in future; for Chitrakala, an opportunity for gratification of her desire in the present. What could be the outcome of such an attachment? Human beings are totally incapable of foreseeing the future.

Chapter Nineteen
Nakaphodia's Mother

When cholera claimed her twenty-year-old son Nakaphodia, who supported her, his mother shut the door and lay alone in her house for several days. She cried day and night until her eyes grew dim. But an empty stomach would not listen to the excuse that one was heart-broken with sorrow. There was no money in the house; everything was spent on *vaidya*'s fees, medicines and invalid diet during her son's illness. Whatever household articles were there, she sold off one after the other. There was nothing left: even wealth as immense as the sands on the sea shore gets exhausted if one spends it without earning anything. At last, she sold off her homestead and built herself a hut in a cow stall in the garden of Nandankishore Baboo's house in Sabjada Bazaar. Now she had to go out to look for work— no one would come and give her food at her doorstep. The old woman had mastered one useful skill: she was an expert at tying a top-knot. No one could pass a comb through a woman's hair as expertly she could. Leaning on a staff and stooping low, she went to different houses and there she tied the topknots of daughters-in-law and other young women. In return, she got a seer of rice, or a handful of *dal* or two paise. She was possessed of another skill: She knew how to flatter the vanity of young women. They sometimes threw her a cast-off sari, and with this she managed to cloth herself.

She heard one day that the *nazar*'s wife had arrived from the mofussil. She could not wait. Tapping the ground with her staff she reached the *nazar*'s house and calling out 'Saantani', 'Saantani' she went straight into the inner courtyard. She sat down beside the *nazar*'s wife and gave an elaborate account of her many sterling qualities. The substance of what she said was this: no one in the whole of

Cuttack was her equal in dressing a lady's hair. When she tied a top-knot, a face looked beautiful like the moon. All young women, married and unmarried, got their top-knots done by her. No one else would do for them. She did not have a moment's leisure throughout the day for she went from village to village tying top-knots for young women. She gave a recital of her many accomplishments in this vein. On hearing this, the *nazar*'s wife could not control herself. She ran in, brought her toilet box and placed if before the old woman. In the box lay two horn combs, a round mirror, a vermillion box, several oil-coated hairpins, a quantity of oil mixed with wax and spices. The *nazar*'s wife sat herself down on a rush mat and loosened her hair. Nakaphodia's mother placed herself behind her and tied a neat top-knot in the style fashionable in Cuttack at the time. The *nazar*'s wife looked at her own face for a long time in the round mirror. From the expression on her face, the old woman gathered that she was extremely pleased— it seemed as if she was telling herself that, Nakaphodia's mother really knew how to make a beautiful top-knot. She asked the old woman to come every day and tie her top-knot.

Since that day, Nakaphodia's mother came twice or thrice to do her job. After her work was over, she would sit for an hour or so talking about all manner of things—hoping all the while that the *nazar*'s wife would guess what she expected, and give her something. The house was visited by men of importance. It would not look nice if she shamelessly asked for something. After all, one had to be mindful of these points of decency.

Soon Nakaphodia's mother came to realize that this place was hard, unyielding like stone. She would never get a thing if she did not open her mouth and ask for it. One day, after she finished tying the top-knot, she talked around the subject for a time, then got to the point abruptly, 'O Saantaani, there was nothing to eat at my house today. Please give me a seer of rice.'

The *nazar*'s wife thought to herself, 'What is this? Ours is after all the house of a big officer. People should bring us many gifts, and they should come and do our work for us. But this woman comes and says, "Give me rice."' She pulled a face and walked away. Nakaphodia's mother was a woman of Cuttack; she knew how to extract juice even from a dry stone. She resolved to wait and se

She understood the *nazar*'s wife thoroughly. The *nazar*'s wife presented no difficulty to someone who had read so many young women like open books.

The next day she arrived a little earlier than usual and, smiling, sat down to comb the *nazar*'s wife's hair. While combing the hair, she kept showering praises upon the *nazar*'s wife. She said, 'My lady, my own hair has turned grey doing this sort of work. I've combed the hair of women of many very rich families in Cuttack. But nobody's head looks as beautiful as yours after your top-knot is made. It is as if the moon has descended from the sky on the earth. Your hair is soft like silk. With your bun decked with flowers you look beautiful like a goddess adorned with Malati flowers.' The author briefly mentions only some of the things she said to minimize his labour. Consider the cases of many young ladies of many different families in many different places. Nakaphodia's mother proved that it was difficult to find one in a million who could match the *nazar*'s wife's face in beauty. 'You will stand out from among thousands of young ladies,' she told her. Elated, the *nazar*'s wife said, 'Is it true, is it true, Nakaphodia's mother? I don't believe you. I can't believe you' Nakaphodia's mother replied, 'Why get into an argument over this? To find out if I'm telling a lie or the truth, just pick up a mirror and look at your own handsome face.' Now the *nazar*'s wife was beside herself with joy. She said, 'Well, well' and opening her mouth wide, looked at herself in the glass.

We think the *nazar*'s wife's excitement and her consulting a mirror may have made some of our young readers among the fair sex laugh. The author dare not say anything to these young ladies. Since they are young, they must be beautiful, and in their own opinion, they must also be very clever, or else how could they think the *nazar*'s wife's conduct ridiculous and burst out laughing? Such beautiful and clever women make the author feel so diffident he dare not say anything to them. However, he feels he must nevertheless venture to tell them a story, which runs like this:

In another country there was once an old man. He was very ugly to look at. People called him a poet. One day, gathering his wits, he sat down to write a novel. But how could an ugly old man like him imagine a beautiful heroine? The heroine of the novel he

wrote regarded herself a beauty and saw her face in the mirror ten times a day. If pretty young women like you laugh in derision at her for consulting the mirror so frequently, you then treat her with undeserved contempt. Your sarcasm and your ridicule will cause the poet great anguish. Goaded by sorrows or anger, he may burst out, "O you beautiful young ladies! Don't you sit alone of an afternoon arranging your hair after your work is done? Having combed your hair, you then rub your face with a piece of wet cloth until it turns ruddy. Doesn't a glow of satisfaction spread all over your face when you take a good look at your lips, your nose in a mirror. So we say: every young woman is fascinated by her own appearance. The author may now ask, 'What is wrong with the *nazar*'s wife's conduct?"'

The old woman saw that her spell had worked. She said, 'It is the talk of the town of Cuttack that there is no woman around who is your equal in beauty. As for your charitable nature, people say if you simply flick your hand, the bellies of a thousand poor fellows get filled up. I tell the other women, "What do I care if I come to your house or not. I am not able to finish what I get from our *nazar*'s wife."'

Later, we received information that, from now on, Nakaphodia's mother did not have to worry about arranging rice for two meals. And with the rotten, worm-eaten vegetables she got, she managed to cook curries to go with at least three of her meals.

Chapter Twenty
A Battle

The frequent visits of Nakaphodia's mother to the *nazar*'s residence gave Chitrakala cause for anxiety. She made up her mind that it was not safe for her to overlook the presence of an old woman, who was a chatterbox and a regular visitor to all the households around. She therefore kept looking for ways to get rid of this woman through others, herself remaining behind the scene. Clever Chitrakala also realized that things might go wrong if she acted in haste.

It was the moth hour of the evening. It was not yet time for lighting clay lamps to the deity in the *nazar*'s house. Chitrakala arrived carrying groceries from the market. The *nazar*'s wife, sitting on the verandah, received different items from Chitrakala one by one, tallying these with a list. Chitrakala mentioned the price of each item as she handed it over— two and a half paise for a seer of fish; one paise for a seer of salt. 'I haggled with the shopkeeper, quarreled with him. But he charged me six pice per seer of oil, not one paise less.' She said so on and on. In the mean time, Nakaphodia's mother entered quietly and stood close behind her. Chitrakala and the *nazar*'s wife were so busy looking into the list that they were not at all aware of her presence. The old woman had earlier had heard from others about Chitrakala's new method of shopping, but today she got to know of it at first hand and she felt much amused. She moved back a few paces and stood behind a pillar in order to be able to find out more. She heard Chitrakala saying, 'One paise for these hundred and twenty cardamoms, one paisa and a half for one hundred betel leaves; (Nakaphodia's mother said to herself, ' Fourteen generations of your forefathers must surely have eaten a lot of betel leaves.) The

nazar's wife said, 'Chitrakala. You have bought so many betel leaves for only one paise and a half. Yesterday in the afternoon I sent Nakaphodia's mother to buy betel leaves worth two pice. She got only a few leaves. She said that betel leaves sold five or six to a paisa and you got twenty leaves for two pice.' For a moment, Chitrakala sat in silence. She thought to herself, 'This is the right time.' Then she said, 'Your Highness. Now you can see for yourself. That old woman is a thief. She has bought betel leaves for only half a paisa, and has pocketed the rest of the money. I know what she is like. So does everyone in Cuttack. You will get to hear about her in due time; but if I don't tell you now, you will say in future that Chitrakala knew everything but did not warn you. You will then blame me!' Up to this time, everything Nakaphodia's mother heard was making her smile, but when she heard what was being said about herself, she felt as if anger made her body burn. She withdrew a few more paces behind the pillar just as a snake moves back and contracts its body before pouncing on a frog.

Chitrakala went on, 'Your Highness, she is a hardened thief. No one in Cuttack allows her to approach his doorstep because they know she is a witch. They chase her away with a broomstick. Through her witchcraft she can make money come flying from a house to her. In her house, money lies scattered all over the place. She will steal it all away. You will not even be able to know when and how. Be careful from now itself, and don't blame me afterwards. And being a witch – little children, young women—" Nakaphodia's mother could not control herself any more. 'You who lick left-over food, you who wander from house to house, you wretched slave, you call me a thief, a sorceress, a witch!' She shouted, and leapt out of her hiding place. Words kept pouring out of her toothless mouth with the force of a torrent. Taken aback, Chitrakala fell back. But she was not a woman who would take anything lying down. She let out a scream and charged at the old woman. The upper half of the bent body of Nakaphodia's mother moved up and down like a husking paddle. With her left hand she clutched a staff and her right hand moved rapidly like a winnowing basket separating chaff from grain. She danced in the outer courtyard like a shaman on stilts dancing in front a goddess, possessed. For her part, Chitrakala fell upon the old women

like a drongo attacking a crow. Sterling Sahib has given a brief account of a fight between two woman belonging to the lower classes in Orissa. Readers may find it in his *History of Orissa*. The combined screams of the two women, when echoed by the pucca buildings, sounded like thunder. The combatants not only exchanged abuse; each made arrangements for sending fourteen generations of the others' ancestors to horrible, painful places. It is a pity that the author feels totally unable to record the expressions used at the time of this quarrel. Some of these expressions may be found in books such as *Natu Chori* (The Theft of a Top), *Bhutakeli* (Play of Ghosts), *Aai Natuni Rahasya* (Conversation between a Grandmother and Her Granddaughter), books which our printers have recently brought out to improve the condition of the Oriya language. But these books will not give us all the expressions. We hope other books will supply this deficiency. Our attempts to look these words up in dictionaries such as *Amar Kosha*, Madhusudan Rao's Dictionary have proved wholly unsuccessful. We had at last to discontinue our search under these circumstances.

Up to this point, our two combatants carried on a purely verbal duel. Soon they edged closer and came face to face. Then one gave the other a push. Now began a phase of exchange of blows. Outside, it was already dark. Human figures were no longer fully visible. The two battling figures seemed to have rolled into one— only the sound of wild screams, resounding slaps, and hard blows, came. Some of the blows landed on human bodies, some missed their target and fell on the pillar. It is said that one blow from a blacksmith equals four from a goldsmith. One heavy blow from the old woman's staff came as a reply to four slaps from Chitrakala.

But could an old woman match Chitrakala in physical strength? The two were now covered in blood. At last, completely exhausted, the old woman began to totter. She could now no longer contain herself. She knew a vital secret; but since it involved the *nazar* himself, she never dared speak out for fear that he might get incensed and bar her from entering his house. But now she did not care for the consequences and blurted it out, ' O you who lick left-over food, you slave woman, you who devour human limbs, you widow! Who has given you all these jewels you have put on? The *nazar* has given

you all these. You carry on with him; he gives you money in secret, with which you buy things from the market; and then you boast before Saantani that you get everything very cheap.'

Seated on the verandah, her legs stretched, the *nazar*'s wife was until now watching the two women fight, amused. The words of Nakaphodia's mother made her feel as if someone poured on her burning embers. No wife could ever bear the thought of her husband falling in love with another woman and buying her ornaments. The *nazar*'s wife was no exception.

Shouting, 'You who lick left-over food, you slave-woman', she leapt down from the verandah. Her head was uncovered. The *nazar*'s wife was always a little careless about the way she dressed herself. The end of her sari now trailed the ground. When she suddenly leapt down, her waist knot was loosened; she had no time to tie it up. She held it tightly with her left hand. She came and stood between the other two women, who were screaming and fighting— they had no time to see that the *nazar*'s wife had come between them. Blows from both the sides— resounding slaps, loud fisticuffs, and heavy blows from the staff— now rained down on her. The *nazar*'s wife got no chance to vent her anger; she felt dazed, stupefied. The blows landed on her from all directions. In the complete darkness no escape route was visible. Where could she go? She stood up and, in a voice that sounded like a donkey braying, she cried, 'Help, help. These two maidservants are killing me. Someone, please come to my rescue.' Her shout drowned out the screams of the other two women. The two combatants now stopped dead and stood stock-still. Saying, 'O heavens, we beat up the Saantani!' they ran off in two different directions. At last, the Saantani found an escape route. She ran into her bedroom, bolted the doors and slumped into the bed. Her whole body ached. She rubbed herself with her hands and howled.

Her profuse sweat drenched the bedcover. She sobbed for an hour or so, and then became quiet. Two maidservants beat me up! Feelings of rage and humiliation made her mind ache with as much pain as racked her body. She wanted to rush out and thrash them with a broomstick, to tear them to pieces with her teeth. But she felt scared they might give her another beating. How could she dare go near them again? After a time, the pain in her body subsided a little and she was able to take thought.

First thought— Is the *nazar* in love with Chitra? That he likes her everyone knows. He himself has told me that she owns a lot of property. She has no one of her own in the world. She will therefore make all her property over to us. This is why my husband likes her. But the old woman said he is in love with her. What does that mean? I haven't noticed anything untoward! Never mind these things— how could a maid dare strike me? I'll thrash her with a broomstick and throw her out.

Second thought— 'Did the *nazar* spend money from his own pocket to get so many jewels made for Chitra? She herself has so much money; and she wants to give us all that; why should she take any money from the *nazar*? Chitra must have given her own money to the *nazar*, with which he has bought the jewels. Chitra does so much household work for us. She has never asked for anything. And this old woman, who only ties top-knots, and keeps asking for things— for rice, for brinjals. Again, every evening Chitra brings me many varieties of sweets from her brother's sweet shop. I eat these before the *nazar* returns from the cutcherry. These sweets I'll never get if I throw Chitra out. But who cares for these sweets. I must drive her away.' She groaned as she ran her fingers over her bruised body for the second time.

The last thought— 'What about the problem that keeps worrying me? Counting my fingers I realize that I have been married for eight years now. I have not yet been blessed with a child. Who will inherit all this wealth? Chitra says she has made it possible for many a childless woman in Cuttack to give birth to several children. She has promised me to take me to Goddess Mangala of Kakatpur on the last day of the dark fortnight. The priest will offer worship to the Goddess in the dead of the night and sacrifice a black goat, a black hen, a black cat and a black *dakuni* fruit to enable me to conceive at the end of three months, three fortnights, three days and three hours. Who will get all this done if Chitra is thrown out. Only she knows how to arrange all this. Let me wait for my husband. Oh, why is he so late today?'

It was about ten o'clock at night when the *nazar* came home. At five in the afternoon, when the cutcherry closed, two orderlies arrived carrying the road cess collected from the mofussil. The treasury was

closed for the day. It was against the rules for orderlies to keep money in their care. The *nazar* was delayed for he had to receive the money after looking into the relevant papers and counting it. When he reached his residence, he saw no one around; the house was buried in darkness, the provisions bought from the market lay scattered all over the place. He called out; but no response came. He knocked on the bedroom door. It was bolted from inside. At this time, someone clucked her tongue and made a sign to him to come to her. The old woman lay unconscious near the pillar. When the *nazar* came to the back door of the house, someone took him by the hand in the dark and dragged him into the backyard. The two then talked in whispers for a long time in the dark. After this, the *nazar* walked up to the bedroom door and shook the bag full of coins in front of it. He said, 'Today I got a lot of money from the cutcherry. I got delayed because I had to count it before I brought it home. I had a mind to get a gold necklace with beads like champak buds, made for you with this money. Ram Prusty, the goldsmith from Buxibazaar, is here to take the measurements. But the door is shut. Let him go.'

The *nazar*'s wife was getting ready to open the door. When she heard what the *nazar* said, she threw the door open and came out on to the verandah. She sat down to the floor spent an hour or so howling and panting like she did before. Then she sobbed and told her husband, 'See, how savagely the maidservants have beaten me.' She pulled the *nazar*'s hand and showed him her back, her arms, and other places in her body. The *nazar* felt these places and noticed lines of swellings as big as a large fruit. When he ran his fingers over her face, she groaned in pain and flinched. There was a large swelling on the eyelid. Something sticky touched the *nazar*'s hands. 'What! This is blood! Who hit you?' His wife said, 'The two maidservants, the two maidservants.' 'What? The two maid servants struck you?' The *nazar* shouted angrily and bellowed, 'Chitra, Chitra' Chitra came up and stood near him. She set up a howl. Who could bear to listen to her heart-rending cries? She groped for the feet of the *nazar* couple and banged her head noisily on these pairs of feet. Had the place been lighted, one would have noticed that she pretended to bang her head; she only pounded the floor with her clenched fist. Had she banged her head in earnest, why one, two heads would have cracked up

Weeping bitterly, Chitra said, 'Your Highness. You are my Saantani—my goddess, my deity— how could I ever dare raise my hand against your sacred person? If I did so, may my hands decay and drop off; may leprosy wither them away, may worms devour them so that I may not be able to eat rice, and may die of hunger. I stretch my hands out towards God and I swear by Lord Jagannath, that I have not beaten my lady. I swear touching these pairs of feet that I'll go blind if I'm telling a lie. That old woman, that witch, that thief and not I attacked my lady.' The *nazar*'s anger towards Chitra abated somewhat. He asked, ' Chitra says she has not struck you.' His wife kept quiet for a while and replied, ' I could not see clearly in the dark. It seemed to me that both of them stood close to me and hit me.' A judge always shows a little partiality towards his favourites. The *nazar*'s wife was getting slightly disposed to a belief in Chitrakala's innocence. Getting a hint of this, clever Chitrakala promptly put in, 'Yes, my lady. You are absolutely right. That is exactly what happened.' As soon as I saw that witch hitting my lady I rushed to her and took the blows on my head and my back. I thought to myself, Alas, alas what a terrible thing has happened! Let her strike me, break my back, blind me or break my bones but let my lady receive not a single scratch.' See, see—what I've suffered in order to save my lady.' She took the *nazar*'s hand and passed it all over her body. In reality, it was covered with swellings and bruises. The evidence of Chitra's devoted loyalty to his wife, her selflessness, her willingness to suffer for the sake of others melted the *nazar*'s heart. All his rage was now directed against Nakaphodia's mother. He was convinced that it was the old woman who had beaten the other two women. She was, without doubt, must be a thoroughly wicked person. Chitra added, 'My lord, haven't you noticed how she never went without carrying a cudgel? How would you notice? You spend all your time at the durbar of the cutcherry. This old woman is barred from entering any house in Cuttack for she has assaulted so many daughters and daughter-in-laws. Both of you are generous like Lord Mahadev, and kindness incarnate. You allowed her to come into your house because you took pity on a poor helpless woman. And see what she has done—under the slightest pretext, she raised her cudgel. What strange ways are these? Does a woman ever raise

her hand to beat anyone? Even if someone kills me, I won't lift my hand even in self-defence. O Ram, O Ram.' The *nazar*'s wife was going to say something; but Chitra ran to her, and holding her legs, started crying, 'O my lady. So many blows she gave you. O my Goddess. What pain the blows must have caused to your delicate body. O the gem on my head!' Chitra would have gone on and on in this vein for quite some time, had the *nazar* not roared, 'Where is that wicked hunch-backed old woman?' Chitra quickly released the feet of the *nazar*'s wife and went out to search for the old woman. But at that time, Nakaphodia's mother lay fast asleep in her hut on a piece of rag after having emptied into her mouth a tumble-full of water out of her leaking tumbler. She had overheard what went on among the other three from behind the pillar. She had even thought of coming out and saying a few things to the *nazar* to prove her innocence. But it was true she had struck his wife. The marks of beating were all too visible. What could she say after this? All three were now her enemies. All three were strong. The place was an unsafe one from her point of view. If she had had to face them in a bazaar or open road, she would have given as good as she would get. But now escape she must. She silently groped around for her staff and located it. She got up quietly, tiptoed to the doorway, and then she fled. All Chitra's blow had landed on the upper half of her body; now her legs got bruised as she ran desperately; she did not stop until she reached home.

Though she searched hard, Chitra did not find her in the dark. So she struck a match. Carrying a clay lamp she looked into every nook and corner of the house. Finding no one she said at last, 'All right, you have escaped today. You must have placed a champak flower on the head of a goddess. That is why you could give me the slip. I felt handicapped for I was shielding my lady. Otherwise, I would never have allowed you to get away. You dare beat my lady, my goddess? You took her for the others you have beaten up. But my lady is a big officer's wife; she is a goddess. All right. All right. I am only waiting for the day to break. I don't care if the sahib s ds me to the gallows. I'll first sink my teeth into her neck, drink he loo and only after I do so will I touch food or water.'

The *nazar*'s wife suddenly looked at herself and noticed that she was draped with only a bedsheet. She hurriedly disappeared into the house without saying a word. The *nazar* could not understand anything. He took off his cutcherry uniform, had his tiffin and settled into a relaxed mood. Chitra brought him tobacco, and he pulled noisily at a spluttering *hookah*. Then she hurried out of the house, and brought over a large quantity of sweetmeats. After a lot of cajoling, she managed to make the *nazar*'s wife come out and sit down to eat. In no time, her mistress munched and swallowed all the sweets. She drank up a whole tumblerful of water, making sucking noises, and recovered some of her strength.

The *nazar*'s wife now felt very pleased with Chitra. Chitra refilled the *nazar*'s *hookah* with tobacco and rolled out a bedsheet for his wife. Saying 'Oh, how much pain this body has endured,' she busied herself with massaging her feet.

Pulling at his *hookah*, the *nazar* asked, 'Tell me. What made that old woman strike you?' His wife was going to say something. But Chitrakala promptly cut in, 'Don't you know, master? My lady has not got to the heart of the matter yet. But I figured it all out long since. That old woman wanted that she should buy provisions for your house. But who could be wiser than my lady? She understood everything. She gave me money and bought everything from the shops through me. The old woman was very put out by this. She arrived when my lady was tallying the provisions against the shopping list and she exploded with anger and madly hit her with her cudgel.'

The *nazar*'s wife added, 'Yes, yes. The other day I had sent her to buy betel leaves worth two pice. She brought me betel leaves worth half a paisa and stole the rest of the money.'

Chitra – My master! You can now judge after hearing this. I may be a liar. Whatever I have said may deserve to be thrown into the fire, to be burnt to ash. But please pay attention to what my lady is saying. Is there a more powerful officer or wiser man than you in this land? The few words said by my lady should therefore suffice for you. One can find out if rice is done only by pressing one grain between one's fingers.

The *nazar* – You are right. That old woman is a great thief.

Chitra – If you ask even a five-year old boy in Cuttack, he will tell you that she is a thief. She has been punished with a beating at several places. But you two are kindness incarnate. You don't care who eats your food or who takes something belonging to you. Otherwise, could she have escaped unmolested on the day she bought the betel leaves?'

In the mean time, Chitra had already rubbed the body of her mistress with three bowls of oil. The bruises, which her own blows had made, glistened for they had absorbed much of the oil.

Chitra ran into the house and came back after filling the hookah with tobacco for the third time. She noticed that the tobacco had put the *nazar* in a very good humour. Large puffs of smoke came pouring out of his mouth. Chitra said, 'Master, do you know what that thief told my lady? She said that you had got gold ornaments made for me with your own money. Who doesn't know that I gave you money for buying these ornaments? This old woman stood close by at the time and saw everything. This she reported to my lady today.'

· Chitra's words made everyone happy, The *nazar*'s wife felt happy because she was proved right and she was convinced she was very clever. Chitra was happy for her explanation convinced everyone. The *nazar* was relieved because he got out of the tight spot so easily.

Chapter Twenty-one
Uttararay Passes Away

It is only when someone passes away does one get to know if he was good or bad as a human being.

(*The Bhagabata*)

The tenants of Uttararay and other men of consequence in his zamindari made a beeline to his palace ever since he was taken ill. His fever got worse with each passing day. Four famous and experienced *vaidyas*, who knew their texts thoroughly, had already given up on him. The doctor, who came from Cuttack, took hundred fifty rupees in ready cash and left after declaring the patient beyond cure. Today, the fever entered its thirteenth day. It now seemed beyond control. Uttararay was taken out of the palace, laid out on a clean white sheet in front of the temple of the family deity, Jugal Kishore Jiu, below the pucca platform, on which grew the sacred *tulsi* plant. His head faced the deity and his body was covered with a fine shawl. A line of sandal paste adorned his forehead. A garland of *tulsi* stretched from his neck to his chest. Seated at a distance of some twenty cubits from the patient, an old *vaidya* silently pored over a text written on old palm leaves. No medicine was being administered to the patient today. The medicine text revealed that the temperature would continue to rise until the night of the thirteenth day of the illness. Uttararay's wife clasped her husband's feet and kept staring wide-eyed. Her eyes did not blink. She sat still like a wooden image. Saraswati Dei put into the patient's mouth small quantities of holy water with the help of a spoon. He swallowed a little; but most of it came spilling out of the corners of his mouth. His eldest son, Tikait Narahari, well understood that the end was near. He felt desperately

wretched, and his eyes again and again sought out the faces of his parents and Dhaima. His eyes swam with tears. His younger brother, Srihari, who was only two and a half years old, could not make out anything. He only lisped, 'Maa, what has happened to father, what has happened to father?' and clasped his mother's neck. Dhaima motioned to two maidservants and they bore Srihari away to a place behind the temple. Unwilling to leave, Srihari protested loudly. The maidservants tried to divert him by giving him two dolls.

The space outside the temple was packed with people. If you threw a handful of mustard seeds over their heads, not even one would fall on the ground. But there was no noise— no disorder. They only asked each other in hushed voices, ' What's the news?' But who could reply to their questions? Who knew the answer? The door of the lion gate remained bolted for the *vaidya* had forbidden that anyone should go anywhere near the patient. But once having come into the palace, they would not leave. Haribol Barik was seated below a *baul* tree in front of the temple. His head hung low, Ghana Rout sat himself down beside him and asked, 'Tell me, what is passing through your mind? Nothing is known about how things are inside the temple. What is the matter?' Barik let out a heavy sigh and said, 'Take the name of Lord Hari. Ghana, my son, what do you want to know? What can I say? It breaks my heart, when I think of this situation. You are but a child, born only yesterday. How could you understand? Long experience of life has turned my hair white like jute. I have lived to see three generations of Uttararays. All have fallen victims to this *batakapi* disease. Let's wait for this night to pass. We would talk after that.' Ghana Rout said, 'Do you know, Barik? When Uttararay's father died he was sixty or sixty-eight years of age. It was time for him to go. But our Uttararay is a mere boy, born only yesterday, so to say. Yesterday my mother told me that my son Sankara and our Uttararay are of the same age. They were both born in the month of Magha. Sankara turned only thirty one this Magha.'

In the evening, just at the time when bells pealed loudly to mark the time for the evening worship of the deity, the sound of bitter wailing rose from inside the temple. The lamentation rapidly filled the entire village. Women, men, the old, the young, children

— everyone wailed in distress. The children, not knowing what the matter was, wept and fell to the ground. Chandamani did not wail loudly—she collapsed again and again, losing her consciousness. The two boys cried, 'father, father' for a long time and lay panting after some time. Whom could Dhaima comfort? She was herself dazed with grief. Nevertheless she held the two boys tight in her lap and tried to bring Chandamani round by splashing water into her face. Dhaima was as wise as she was cool-headed. At this terrible moment she reflected, 'Whatever happened has happened. Now I must save these three.' Ten or twelve maidservants came rushing out and bore the two boys and their mother aloft into the palace.

It was night. The whole village lay buried in darkness. But no lamps were lit. Everyone felt as if his/her limbs had got paralyzed; no chore seemed worth doing. Ceaseless weeping had left all of them utterly exhausted. Once Chandamani was taken into the palace, people rushed into the temple premises as water bursts out through a breach in an embankment. They fell over each other in their attempt to have a last glimpse of the mortal remains of Uttararay. The employees of the zamindar and a few other men of consequence sat in a group in one place. Now Rangadhar Mohanty, the *chhamukaran,* said to the *peshkar*, 'It is already midnight. Will it do if we sit like this, stunned and confused?' This brought everyone back to their senses. They swung into action. Arrangements were made to convey the mortal remains of Uttararay on a beautifully decorated litter to the cremation ground. The grand procession was accompanied by flaming torches and four parties of *kirtan* singers. Large crowds of people surrounded the litter on every side. All shouted '*haribol*' and it seemed as if the sky came crashing down. Young wives and daughters of the villages, forgetting all shame, lined the village path on either side and blew conch-shells and ululated. It was as if the image of a goddess was being brought in a procession to the cutcherry. It was about daybreak when the funeral procession returned from the cremation ground. Cries of '*haribol*', *kirtan* songs, the sound of conch shells and ululation had reached villages lying ten miles away. As the saying goes: the sound of a drum carries into a distance of two miles, but the drum of human speech crosses distances of thousands of miles.

Within hours of the daybreak, almost the entire population of the district collected in front of the palace.

Today, no cooking fire was lit in any house in the village. The only topic of discussion everywhere was Uttararay. At the bathing ghat women lamented the demise of Uttararay and wailed as they remembered his sterling qualities.

Uttararay was a pious and generous man; and he was kind to his tenants. No one who had heard his gentle, sweet words which he addressed to him could ever forget them throughout his life. No one could say that he had ever sent away a supplicant empty-handed. For the tenants, he was their stay and support in times of need or danger. People said, ' Uttararay saved those whom even the gods forsook'. All right, he was a very good man, and he helped people generously. But did he do a good turn to everyone? Why is he then being mourned by everyone everywhere? Wherever you went throughout his zamidari, people mourned his death. The fact is, he wished every human being well. Everyone therefore bitterly felt the loss of such a person. He was a godlike man. Who would not feel sad if a god parted company with him? There is a well-known story. We cannot resist the temptation to recount it here.

A poor old woman lived in a market town. In the course of his wanderings, a pundit came to stay at her house as he did not find a lodging anywhere else. One day, a dead body was being carried to the cremation ground past her house and the sound of *haribol* was heard. The old woman called her maidservant over and said, 'Go and find out if the man went to heaven or to hell'. The pundit was utterly confounded. What was this? He had read so many *sastras* but none of them could tell him how to find out if a man went to heaven or to hell after death. How would this unlettered old woman find out about it? He could not control himself and he went and asked the old woman to share her secret with him. She replied, 'O pundit! How could you not understand such a simple thing? When people mourn a man's death he goes to heaven. And when they say, "It is good that troublesome fellow is dead," he goes to hell.

Chapter Twenty-two
Chandamani's Widowhood

Bidhina pratipadayis yata,
Naba Baidhabyamasa hyabedanam
(*Kumar Sambhabam*)

(The grief which fate brings to a woman who has just lost her husband exceeds all other kinds of suffering.)

A husband may be handsome or ugly, rich or poor, virtuous or evil-minded. But for a Hindu woman he is her supreme deity; he is everything to her. Not only in this life, he is her partner and her stay in the life beyond death. The husband is her guide in her life's journey. Through him does she achieve happiness and prosperity. She shares her husband's glory, his wealth, his position and his fame. It is she who enjoys the wealth earned by her husband. Does not the husband therefore mean everything to his wife? On the altar the priest ties their hands with a garland of flowers and invokes ten *digapalas* as witnesses to their sacred union. This garland, which never breaks, binds one to the other for their whole life. A Hindu wife never feels she has a separate existence, being but a part of her husband. Even when true conjugal love between a couple is lacking, they nevertheless remain bound to each other. A widowed woman is helpless, wretched, graceless and she is inauspicious. On auspicious occasions her presence is not wanted. Widows in southern parts of India have their heads shaven and keep them covered. Women, whose husbands are living, leave their heads uncovered and let their hair hang loose. They do so because their husbands are the cover of their heads. It is a good custom. The husband may be a lowly creature, ugly, and extremely poor. The death of even such a husband is an

unbearably painful and devastating experience for his wife. Imagine what losing her husband meant to Uttararay's wife.

Her husband was incomparably handsome; his features were finely moulded through physical exercise; his character was impeccable, and his fame had spread throughout the land. He was generous like a king, and he was endowed with a devout nature. He always devoted himself to his studies and tried to do good to his people. He tenderly looked after his tenants, and remained devoted to his wife. Imagine the anguish, which sears the heart of a woman who loses a husband like Uttararay in the prime of her life. Not only this, to Chandamani her husband meant everything in the world. He was a manifest deity to whom she offered worship. All the rituals she observed, all the *puja*s she performed were meant to ensure his well-being. Only those things which pleased him interested her. No matter how trivial a task was, if it concerned her husband, she never wanted a maidservant to carry it out. It was as if she always kept her ears pricked so as to be able to listen to and execute every command of her husband. She had no life she could call her own. Love for her husband had filled her heart to the brim. The very mention of his name made her heartstrings vibrate. Whenever Dhaima scolded her for her utter indifference to expensive ornaments or money and gold, she would walk away laughing as if she held these in scorn. We suppose that she perhaps thought to herself, 'Why should one who owns a philosopher's stone like this need money?' Now, after she had lost her husband, all Chandamani's hopes, all her confidence, her pleasures and her happiness had vanished into an eternity of darkness. When deep darkness suddenly follows bright light, the former always appears oppressively black. Chandamani was a complete stranger to pain and suffering since her childhood. She had never suffered from illness on account of her robust constitution. Her parents had lavished on her all their love and affection. And for Dhaima, she was a beautiful, playfully mischievous little doll. In her in-laws' house she was treated like a queen, she was her husband's delight; she was full of life, and overflowed with love for her husband. It would be futile to expect an account of what passed through Chandamani's mind when she lost her husband from an insignificant author like me, who does not know how to describe human nature,

nor how to arrange words and feelings in a proper order. May be a young female reader, who has lost a god-like husband on account of sins committed in her previous life will be able to express this anguish tormenting her heart. Only a person who has been bitten by a snake can feel the painful effect of the poison. It was as if the fabric of Chandamani's life had been torn apart. All her senses seemed to have grown numb. Her feet seemed not to feel the earth. Her eyes saw nothing at all. She lay motionless on the ground. Breathing was the only sign of life left in her

Chapter Twenty-three
The *Nazar*'s Visit

You may argue as much as you like
You may gild brass any number of times
But will it turn gold?
—Kabisurya Brahma

God, the almighty, has so decreed that the sun and the moon move along their appointed orbits and make day follow night in unbroken succession. What we call good days and bad days exist only for us. Even during this terrible time, which befell the fort of Naripur, days went over as they had always done.

Today was the fourth day after the demise of zamindar Uttararay. According to family customs, the funeral rites were to be observed from the seventh day onwards. All the employees from the *sudder* and *mofussil* parts of the zamindari, men of rank in the fort, Aridaman Chhotray and his son Pitambar Chhotray were now present in the palace. A meeting was held in the open space in front of the cutcherry near the lion gate of the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore Jiu. There people discussed the list of items needed for the performance of the funeral rites. Haribol Barik stood up, and folded his hands and submitted, ' Praise the Lord. Please take the list of things from me. I know what things are required because for three generations of Uttararays, I have supplied the list.' When he was saying this, the cries of palanquin-bearers were heard. Two *paik*s ran out and came back bearing the information that the *nazar* had arrived from Cuttack. Chhotray remarked, 'Good. Now all of us could put our heads together and prepare a list.' Haribol Barik said, 'Praise the Lord. What did your highness say?' The bearers set the palanquin down with a thud

in front of the palace gate. *Nazar* Natabara Das got out, and made his way straight into the palace. The palace employees and others ran after him to pay their respects, but he lowered his eyes and walked into the palace as if he had not seen anyone. Soon afterwards a loud noise came from inside the palace. People outside could only hear a loud male voice, lamenting, 'O my Chanda, O my Naru, O my Siru. O Dhaima'. Repeating this several times, the *nazar* sank to the ground. No one could see tears in his eyes, perhaps because he often wiped them with his handkerchief. Chandamani sat leaning against the wall like a statue. Only she could say if the bitter lament of her brother reached her ears. After about an hour the *nazar* composed himself and said to Saraswati Dei although his words were in fact meant for Chandamani, ' Dhaima! I would have come a month ago. But my enemies in Cuttack conspired and persuaded the sahib to stop me from coming here. Would such a terrible thing have happened had I been present? Everyone in Cuttack knows what type of man that doctor was who had been brought here. How could people here know? He was sent for at the right moment.' The *nazar* slyly hinted that through this doctor some enemy of Uttararay got him murdered. Otherwise, would he have passed away? Nothing made sense to Chandamani.

To Dhaima everything seemed like a dream. She kept staring at the *nazar*'s face. Chitrakala, who accompanied the *nazar* on his journey from Cuttack, broke into sobs as she passed her hands over Chandamani's back and her legs. When Dhaima eyed her several times, the *nazar* realized that an explanation was in order and said, 'She lives with my mother. She is her god-daughter. Mother has sent her over here to wait upon you. Her name is Lalita.'

Chitrakala alias Lalita said, 'Dhaima, you have heard everything. This has created quite a stir all over Cuttack, and you ask me about only mother? She has sent word to you through me that you should never trust anyone here. The deep game people are playing! How could you who live inside the palace understand it? There is a saying that, when a tiger dies, a jackal thinks he has become the king. Everyone has now ganged up. Their aim is to ruin the lives of these boys and loot everything. The sahib in Cuttack has sent brother after he heard everything. After all, blood is thicker than water. We hang

together, forgetting all our differences, when there is a battle to be fought.' Saraswati Dei's courage now failed her. Her ears buzzed. Her head reeled. True, she knew nothing about what went on outside the palace since the day of Uttaraay's demise. The employees of the cutcherry never took a decision, however small, without first consulting her. But now they were not to be heard or seen. The fact was that the employees and Chhotray had decided not to send any news into the palace. They thought that everyone inside the palace lay numb with grief. Why bother them with what went on outside the place? They got together and managed everything outside the palace. Now their action came to be seen in a totally different light. Things always get complicated like this when bad times arrive. Dhaima said, 'What do you suggest, Nata?' She knew Nata thoroughly. But she had now neither the time nor the strength to find out the truth of the matter by making enquiries. Her common sense had deserted her. Natabara was beginning to feel pleased with himself.

He said, 'What can I say, Dhaima? You will easily understand everything on your own when things will come out into the open. We will discuss these matters later. The sahib has sent you instructions from Cuttack. And mother has sent Lalita. You don't have to do anything. All you have to do is to take special care of the palace. The sahib himself will come here and get everything sorted out. He has sent sepoys with me, who would guard the palace. Think, why did the sahib send government sepoys? Because he had heard something really serious. Anyway, we will talk about this later. I said these few words so that you will remain watchful. The funeral rites will be observed when the dawn breaks. And this is not the funeral of some ordinary person. This is a funeral of the king of this land, someone whose fame had spread to twenty other kingdoms. But we don't care for fame or loss of honour. If anything goes wrong with the observance of the funeral rites, his soul cannot enter heaven, it will be stopped on its journey along river Baitarani and sent straight to hell. Not only this, calamity will befall the family and the children. Should such a thing be allowed to happen when a wise woman like you is here. No, I'll never let this happen.' Saraswati Dei became petrified. She was at her wit's end. Her mind did not work. All she could manage to say was, ' Nata. Do whatever you think fit.' Natabar said, ' Dhaima!

Why then did the sahib send me here at night? It is not a domestic matter. I have given my word of honour to the sahib. If everything is not done properly I stand to lose my job. I was under the impression that Dhaima, who has so many servants, record-keepers and *patwari* 's at her command, would have made all the necessary arrangements for the funeral. But no one is to be seen. Everyone keeps to his own house. Where is that gentleman who is lovingly called mausa? He who is the villain of the piece. They have swallowed up all the ready cash in the treasury of the cutcherry and having wiped their mouths clean, they now sit quietly. But don't you worry, Dhaima. Do you think I have come empty-handed? The sahib has given me money. It doesn't matter if we have to spend ten or twenty thousand rupees on the funeral. I will manage the show. But the problem is, Cuttack is thirty miles away. What we are doing is no ordinary task. The moment a difficulty arises, arrangements have to be made to remove it. It is not a work which could be delayed by a day or two. If I fall short of a few thousand rupees— say two or four thousand— I hope you will surely help me out. I will send the money back as soon as I arrive back in Cuttack.' Saraswati Dei said, 'No, dear Nata. We have got plenty of money. There will be no problem. Chanda has two thousand rupees in her cash box. Take this money if you need it.' Natabara baboo put his fingers into his ears and exclaimed, ' Ram! Ram! What do you say, Dhaima. That money is like black poison to me— impure like cow's blood. How could I touch this money? However, if I fail to manage things, I'll send word through Lalita and you will send me the money for only two days. I won't be able to come myself for I'll remain heavily occupied with work.' When surrounded by deep darkness even the feeblest ray of light fills one's heart with hope. The news that the sahib had sent Natabara from Cuttack, and that her sister had sent Lalita, the consolation he offered at this time of distress, the indifference of cutcherry employees to arrangements for the funeral, and Natabara's eagerness to sort out the problems— all this convinced Saraswati Dei, otherwise a sharp-witted woman, that Natabara was her only source of support at this time of crisis. She forgot all other considerations. She could not think— her power of reflection was gone. Before taking leave the *nazar* stroked the heads of the two boys, and said, kissing them, 'You see, Dhaima,

who is there whom I could call my own? These two boys mean everything in the world to me. Whatever I earn, I earn only for them. These boys will continue two family lines, offer oblation to the manes of two families.'

Taking leave of Dhaima, the *nazar* came to the temple. In the open space in front of the cutcherry near the temple his palanquin had been kept ready. Since night had fallen, everyone had gone home. Only the old *chhamukaran* stood there to wait upon the *nazar*. He asked the *nazar*, 'What would you have for your dinner tonight. *Prasad* is ready.' The *nazar* said scornfully, ' Oh, we are very hungry indeed. You think we would have *prasad*! Go, go. You yourself take it and go to bed.' We think the *nazar* spent half an hour inside the palanquin doing his evening ablutions. The bearers had earlier kept there a pitcher of purified water. His evening ablutions over, he guzzled two tumblers of water in one breath. Paans and hookah had already been prepared. For a long time one heard his hookah splutter inside the palanquin.

Chapter Twenty-four

The *Nazar* orders Affairs

Very early next morning, the *nazar*'s barber rolled out a carpet in the front yard of the cutcherry and placed on it a large bolster. Seated on this, the *nazar* pulled at his hookah, which kept spluttering. He had sent for all the employees working in the sudder and mofussil parts of the zamindari. Everyone came post-haste to his presence for they thought the *nazar* would make necessary arrangements for the observance of the funeral rites. But the rites were not mentioned even in passing. They were instead given strict orders to submit to him the records and the accounts of the zamindari. It was said to be the order of the Collector Sahib himself, and they were given four hours to comply with it. The Collector's guards, who had come with the *nazar* from Cuttack, followed every one of the employees. A few guards posted themselves at the front and back gates of the palace. No one, man or woman, was allowed to go in. No one was permitted to come out of the palace either. The *nazar* took great care to explain to everyone that everything was being done in accordance with the orders of the Collector Sahib. The record keepers were in a state of extreme confusion.

They were also terribly hard pressed. Everyone was now busy working hard to ensure the smooth observance of the funeral rites. Who would now follow the *nazar*'s orders? The *nazar* became very cross with them if any record- keeper raised the matter of the rites. What could they do? The *nazar* was no ordinary person. He was, after all, the brother of Uttararay's wife. Besides, he was someone who was acting on behalf of the Collector Sahib. Everyone sat still, as if their hands had been tied up. The *nazar* wanted that the ceremony should not be held on a grand scale. His plan was to manage things

anyhow, with as little expense as possible. Getting things for free, if possible, and getting things on credit, if necessary. Money had to be saved at all costs. The record-keepers and other employees realized that a disaster was imminent— it might even turn into a calamity. But none dared confront the *nazar*. All went and approached Chhotray. He came up to the *nazar* and said, ' Natabara baboo, the scrutiny of records can wait. Let us first see to it that the rites are observed.' Chhotray was a zamindar himself. And he was old enough to be the *nazar*'s father. But the *nazar* showed no respect to him, did not fold his hands or even utter a polite word. He lost his temper and said curtly, 'You keep your mouth shut. I have found out everything. Nothing needs to be done. If you utter a single word, I will be compelled to write to the sahib that you are obstructing government work.' It was as if someone poured burning embers on Chhotray's head. He hissed like a cobra when its tail is twisted. Had this happened to him at another time and at another place, a river of blood would have flowed. But today he stayed his hand and bit his tongue and stood trembling. The temperament of the *khandayat*s was such that they could sacrifice wealth, even their lives, but they could never put up with an affront. The principle which guided their conduct was: 'Lose everything, but preserve your honour at all costs, for once honour is gone, it can never be retrieved.' In the past, a word would have provoked them to quarrel violently, even commit murder. During the rule of Emperor Akbar all the zamindaries in Orissa were in the possession of *khandayat*s. This hot-blooded behaviour made them lose their estates. Chhotrray's son, the *peshkar*, was standing near his father. He could sense that the situation was getting out of hand. He took his father by the hand and led him away. He thought to himself, 'Let the *nazar* do whatever he likes. The zamindari would automatically be placed under court of wards. Things would settle down soon. Chhotray could not control himself. He got into his palanquin and left in a high dudgeon. Haribol Barik ran after him and stopped the palanquin in the middle of rice fields by holding down its front shaft. The bearers set the palanquin down and stepped aside. Old Rangadhar Pattnaik, the sudder *chhamukaran,* breathlessly scrambled after Haribol. Haribol Barik pleaded, 'Haribol. Your lordship! What is the meaning of all this? Everything for us is lost.

Why take offence? Whose responsibility is all this? Is this a time to think of honour or dishonour? Who will ultimately carry the burden of the blame? Forget what has happened and be gracious. Retrace your steps.' He might be a poor barber, but he said something which sounded most sensible. Chhotray cooled down immediately. This is also a peculiar trait in the nature of *khandayat*s. They could see what is just or what is unjust if one explained things to them gently and tactfully. Chhotray turned to look at Rangadhar Pattnayak. Old Pattnayak could read his mind and submitted, 'Yes. He is right, isn't he?' After this the three of them conferred together for about an hour in the middle of the rice fields. Chhotray returned to the palace. The record keepers and *karana*s promptly set about arranging items required for the performance of the rites. Everybody was busy doing his part; no one waited for instructions from another. From the seventh day after Uttararay's death, curd, sweetmeats, molasses kept arriving in enormous quantities. Every day thousands of brahmins, vaishnavs and beggars were feasted. But even so, the provisions did not run out. Servants, village chiefs, ordinary villagers, young and old were all hard at work. All felt the funeral was their own responsibility. A lot of provisions came from Chhotray's palace. And seated in the palace, Chhotray directed everyone and oversaw everything. If any difficulty arose, people came running to him and sought his advice. The *nazar* could not at all figure out where provisions came from or who advanced the money. No one came to him even when he called someone to his side. He was cross with everybody. But he was a clever crook. Didn't he know the limits to his own power? He noticed that everything was neatly done. He ran about like a busybody making a lot of noise. But who would care for him? Lalita alias Chitrakala boasted before Dhaima and before Chandamani and the maidservants in the palace, 'The *nazar* is managing everything. Not all the items are available here. Bullock carts have been sent to Cuttack.' Inside the palace everyone believed her for no news came from outside. The employees of the zamindari were busy doing their work. To whom would they send any news? Who was there to listen to them? Those who needed to be informed might be lying unconscious. At the time of giving the brahmins their ceremonial gifts of money the *nazar* was seen giving some money on his own. People living near

the *sudder* gate of the palace said that a woman came out of the palace late at night and put two heavy bags into the *nazar*'s hands. Some thought that it could be the money sent from inside the palace to give the brahmins their fees. But only a few rupees, not two bags of money, were needed to pay the brahmins.

Everybody was of the opinion that the Uttararay's funeral was performed on a much grander scale than anyone had expected. Brahmins, *vaishnavs* and beggars went away happily showering their blessings after they received gifts of money.

Chapter Twenty-five

The Assembly of Pundits

On the occasion of zamindar Pratap Udit Malla Uttararay's funeral renowned brahmin pundits were invited from all over the territory extending from river Ganga to river Godabari. (These two rivers had marked the boundaries of the ancient kingdom of Utkal now called Orissa.) A few learned pundits from Kashi and Nabadweep, two famous centers of learning, had also come. A large embroidered carpet was spread out in the open space in front of the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore. With so many learned scholars seated on it, the pandal presented a very impressive spectacle. Giving and receiving pinches of snuff, and exchanging information about their physical and other kinds of well-being kept the learned pundits occupied. Presently the court pundit of Uttararay family, Purusottam Rath stood in the middle of the assembly, and humbly submitted, hands folded, 'Oh, you learned scholars. This royal family feels itself greatly honoured by receiving the dust from your feet. The chief who would have offered you proper hospitality today befitting your elevated position is no more. On behalf of the bereaved widow, the mother of two young landlords, and the grandmother in the palace I pay you homage and pray to all of you to be so gracious as to give them your blessings.'

The assembled pundits rose to their feet and offered their blessings—

Jayostu jayostu saputra sukhini bhaba
Ayurarogyeswarganam bibrudhayah santu
Putrau te yashaswanau bhabatam
Taba prajanam sagotranam sibamastu

(May she and her sons be happy/ may she live longer / and may her health and wealth increase/ may her sons achieve fame/ may her subjects and kin prosper)

After the pundits resumed their seats, pundit Artatrana Kabisiromani of the Sanskrit *tol* in Balasore stood up and said, 'We propose the name of the esteemed Srijukta Sadashiv Vidyasagar, who is one of the pundits of the *Muktimandap,* as the president of this important meeting.' All the pundits raised their hands and loudly voiced their approval saying, 'So be it. So be it.'

The court pundit of the kingdom of Dhenkanal, Kelei Mishra Vidyaratna said, 'We are waiting to listen to a brief exposition of the *sastras* from the lips of the learned president.'

Now the president took a few pinches of snuff, and having rubbed his long nose with his fingers, cleared his throat a few times and began—

Yam shaiba samupasante shiva
Iti brahmeti vedantinah
Boudha buddha iti pramanapatabah
Kartleti naiyayikah
Ahannityartha jainasasanaratah
Karmeti mimanska
Soayam bo bidadhatu banchhitaphalam
Trailokyanatho hari

(May he, to whom many offer worship by many names/ whom Shaivas worship as Shiva, theVedantins as Brahaman/the Buddhists as Budhha and the authorities on Nyaya as the Doer/ the Jainas as Arhans and Mimaakas as Karma/ may this God, fulfill your wishes.)

The court pundit of Praharaj, the chief of Balyabedha, asked, 'Which of the several names of Lord Brahma, which the esteemed president mentioned, is liberating? Which approach to liberation is the best?'

The president replied, ' If you perform your duties with devotion and fill your heart eagerly with the name of the Lord, then all views are right and all the names of the Lord bring salvation. Picture to yourselves thirsty people belonging to different races and religion coming to a pond. Mussulmans called the water *pani*, Oriyas called

it *jala*, and Telugus *nilu*. But pronouncing these different names would not quench their thirst; they all must drink water to their heart's content. Similarly, no one can attain salvation by merely uttering names such as Brahma, Shiva or Krishna. What really matters is heart-felt devotion.'

Purusottam Vidyaratna of Banki asked, 'What are the attributes of the *brahma*?' The president said, 'The greatest of all scriptures, the *Upanishads* state:

Satyam jnanamunatam brahma
Anandarupamamrutam Yad Bibhah
Shantam Shivamadvaitam
Shudhama Papabidhan

Sankaracharya, who was the exponent of the *advaita* theory and an authority on the *Upanishads*, has accepted this view of the attributes of *brahma*. In his opinion *brahma* is matter without property. The visible world is but an illusion or a mirage produced by nature. The entire universe originates in the *brahma*, exists in the *brahma*, and ultimately dissolves into the *brahma*. Eminent exponents of *advaita* believe that the *brahma*, the animate and the inanimate constitute three eternal realities.

Although, the world takes its origin in the *bramha*, it has a separate, independent existence. To substantiate this claim, the following illustration is employed by them: The potter makes pots; but the pots exist independently of him. The potter is only one of the three factors, which go into the making of the pots. The second is clay, and the third is constituted by the potter's wheel, the lever, the rag.

The exponents of *advait* further claim that:

Yeto ba imani Bhutani jayante
Yena jatani jibanti tad bijijnasambha tat brahma

These are the attributes of the brahma. But one must take these to be *tatastha* attributes. Ramanujacharjya is a major exponent of the *advaita* view of reality. We have mentioned earlier that the *brahma* is the substance as well as the adequaate cause of the universe.'

The famous logician from Nabadvipa, Jarakanath Nyayaratra, asked, 'What is the proof of the existence of this great *brahma*? Lesser texts do mention the name of the *brahma*, but the great philosophical texts offer no evidence of the existence of the bramha or God. These philosophical texts are pervaded by a pessimistic view of life. They hold that man groans under an oppressive weight of grief from birth till his death. The aim of philosophy is to find out ways of putting an end to human misery. The great sage, Kapila, has suggested ways for human beings to achieve salvation.

Panchabinshatitattvajno yatra tatrasame baset
Muchyate natra samsayah

Let me elaborate on these twenty-five truths:

Satuarajatamaam samyabastha prakrutih
Prakruturmatian mahato hamkarah
Ahamkarat panchatan matranyubhayamindmiyam
Tanmatrebhyeh sthulabhutani purushah
Iti panchabinshati ganah

Now, you may notice that the philosopher has listed twentyfive truths, which would enable the human soul to achieve liberation, but the list makes absolutely no mention of God. The philosopher clearly states, *Ishwarasidheh.*

You may notice also that the great sage, Kapila has flatly denied the existence of God. Other philosophical systems such as the *Vaisesik* are also full of pessimism. The great sage, Kanada has suggested the following method of eradicating misery and achieving salvation.

Drabyagunakarma samanya biseshes samabayanam
Padarthanam sadharmya baisharmya bhyam tattvajnat nishreyasam.

Which means: Salvation is attained through a knowledge of substance, quality, action, genrality and intimate relation.

The salvation aimed at by the *vaisesika* philosopher, the liberation mentioned in the *Upanishads*, the emancipation of the soul which the *Nyaya* philosophies talk about, the release of which Patanjali speaks and the salvation prized by the Buddhists all mean the same thing. Although Jaimini, the philosopher, acknowledges

the truth of the *Vedas*, for him what ultimately matters is the path of action. The path of knowledge that justified the great *brahma* is of no value whatsoever. Jaimini advises human beings to uplift their souls through devoted action, and organization of *jajnas*. There is no need for them to offer worship to God.

The substance of *Mimansa* philosophy may be presented thus:

Amayasya kriyarthatvat anarthat akyamatadarthanam.

Which means— Action is what the *Vedas* preach. The pursuit of knowledge is futile. According to this all the fundamental truths offered by the *Upanishads* are but a play on words. In other words, statements such as '*Tattvamasi*' '*Satya jnanam anantham brahma*' '*ayamatma brahma*' which occur in the *Upanishads* are totally devoid of meaning. For the emancipation of the soul, all that is needed is action such as *jajnas* etc.

According to *Nyaya* philosophy, the world is a vale of suffering. The suffering is caused by man's birth. The human being is driven by instincts to engage himself in action. The desire to enjoy the fruits of one's actions, which is implanted in human nature, gives rise to feelings such as anger, jealousy and yearning. And these are looked upon as flaws, which are the products of false knowledge. A soul is truly emancipated when it gets rid of this false knowledge.

According to *Nyayasutra*:

Dukha-janma prabrutta-dosha-mithyajnanam uttarottaropaye tadantarapayat apabarga.

Which means: the knowledge of truth brings about the emancipation of the soul, and puts an end to man's intense suffering. The truths about which knowledge is gained are: *pranam, prameya, samsay, prayojan, drustantha, sidhanta, abayab, tarka, nirnaya, bada, jalpa, bitanda, hetuabhash, chhala, jati, nigrahasthan*. In the knowledge of these sixteen truths lies the means of achieving salvation. But these sixteen truths do not at all include the name of God.

Now let us turn to the philosophical system created by the great sage, Patanjali. In his philosophical system, the great sage Kapila has enumerated twentyfive modes of achieving emancipation of the soul. Patanjali accepts all these modes, but he has added one more to the list, namely, the knowledge of God. For Patanjali God is

Kleshakarmabipakashyeiraparamrustah
Purushabisha ishwarah
Tatra niratishaya sarbabeejam.

(God is the particular spirit which untouched by affliction, works or deserts. He is the origin of all things.)

Even when Patanjali acknowledges the existence of God, the road to salvation for him lies through the practice of *yoga*. And what is *yoga*? It consists in disciplining the faculties of the mind. *Yoga* implies exercise in self-control, '*artha asam nirodhak upae.*' What does this disciplining of one's faculties mean?

Abhyasa bairagyabhyam tannirodhah.

We have presented to you in brief a few issues in philosophy. Discussion of each one of these will take a very long time for thousands of great savants have been engaged in exploring these for thousands of years. Thousands of treatises on these have also been written. However, one thing is absolutely certain: discussion of philosophy is indispensable for arriving at a knowledge of the truth.'

Pundit Mrutyunjay Banibhusan Vedantabagish challenged the position taken by his predecessor. He said, 'There is no doubt that Nyaratna is a great scholar and has wide experience. But in expressing his views he has relied only on early philosophical texts. It seems he has not bothered to consult later commentaries on these texts produced by learned commendtators. We therefore want to talk briefly on the subject of the existence of God.

Bijnanabhikshu, in his commentary on *Samkshya* philosophy has this to say on the aphorism '*Iswarasidheh.*' God is inaccessible to the senses; and His existence is not amenable to logical proof.

It is, therefore, unnecessary to discuss any matter relating to him. Had Kapila been an atheist, he would have written '*Iswarabhat*' instead of '*Iswarasidheh.*'

Moreover, the great sage Kanada has mentioned God as the means of attaining salvation at twentysix places in his *vaiseshik* philosophy. Hence he can't be described as an atheist either. A comment on his philosophical system is as follows:

Abashyameba bhoktabyam krutam karma shubhashubham
Nabhuktam kshiyate karma kalpakochishatairapi.

Which means: No matter whether your action is good or evil, you will have to bear its consequences, even after millions of aeons have elapsed. In view of this, Kanada advises human beings to devote themselves to doing good work. Mere worship of God will not help. But Kanada cannot be termed an atheist for holding such a view. Consider the following aphorism by Patanjali:

Tatah pratyekchetanadhigamoeapi antarayabhabashcha

This means that contemplation of God eradicates evils such as diseases and enables one to achieve knowledge of the self.

We have cited here only one aphorism, but in several places in Patanjali's philosophical system, *yoga* means nothing but a surrender of one's self before God.

Again, Jaimini, the founder of the *Mimansa* system of philosophy, is no atheist either because he has never repudiated the *Veda*s. All that he says is that, for attaining salvation, it is necessary to take to the path of action recommended by the *Veda*s; the path of knowledge need not be taken. For holding such a view, Jaimini cannot be styled an atheist.

It is said of Lord Budha, the merciful one that he did not believe in God. But the substance of the advice he gave at the time of his death to his chief disciple, Ananda, is this: Why should one bother about whether God exists or not? Man is possessed of no sense organ, which is capable of feeling the existence of God. What is the point of churning darkness for an answer? You should devote yourself to uplifting your soul. The fruits of your action will enable you to reach the summit. His message has such power that it has now spread over one third of the globe. This man of infinite wisdom was possessed of the foresight that quarrels in the name of God would bring a terrible calamity to the world. See, what happened in reality. In the century after his death, the Muslims and Christians, the Hindus and the Muslims, the Buddhists and the Hindus, and the Protestants and the Catholics have fought bitterly in the name of God and have drowned the world in the blood of millions of human beings. These animosities have not abated in spite of the extensive spread of scientific knowledge in our times.'

The court pundit from Baragarh, Rangabhatla Bhenkata Pantula, put in, 'The subject of philosophy is very tough but it does afford knowledge and wisdom. Although chillies are terribly hot to taste, they are nevertheless the best food in the world. Human beings are doomed without chillies and philosophy.

Maripakailu chintapandu perugumishritam
Veda daryhanasastrani cha sambhabantu mama janmajanmani.

(Green chillies and tamarind mixed together and curd added to them/ Like these, the Vedas and philosophical texts/ Are welcome to me always.)

The pundit was going to offer an exposition of these lines, when the president, Vidyasagar, smiled and said, 'The discussion of philosophy makes it absolutely clear that the great sages sought to discover the final truth about the self; but one can't believe that they were successful. Moreover, the philosophers of our country were not as a matter of fact atheists. Because they refused to recognize an infinite power, an infinite wisdom behind the visible events of the world, whose infallible rules govern every action and on whom the soul wholly depends for its salvation, they arrived at a position from which the world seems to be an illusion or empty. This is logical atheism. The only true atheist was the sage Charvak. But his philosophy, opposed as it was to ethics and religion, has disappeared without a trace.

It is seen that the *Gita* begins where philosophy ends. The *Gita* is a religious scripture in the true sense of the term. Suppose an expert cook prepared a curry out of rich ingredients but forgot to add salt to it. The curry would become utterly tasteless. Likewise, while the philosophers have displayed great skills in discussing problems of knowledge, they left out of their system one very important thing: the worship of God. As a result, their whole system remains incomplete. By its very nature, the soul of man longs for some great ideal some stay and support. This is conspicuous by its absence in philosophical texts.

During childhood, man forms a blind belief in God. Afterwards, when he is able to acquire knowledge. He begins to say 'not this', 'not

this', ' this is not God' and feels tormented by profound doubts. At last, out of these doubts arises a faith in God, and this faith is true and abiding.

On both the subjects— the knowledge derived from books and faith in God – the *Gita*'s counsel is lucid. The *Gita*, therefore is the greatest religious text, a text which is universally accepted. It has earned the respect of wise men all over the world. The abstruse truths of philosophy are not accessible to ordinary people. So, Lord Basudev, to help them achieve salvation, has presented the essential truths in an intelligible form. For this reason

Gita sugita kartabya kimanyatshastrabistareih.

(When the Gita can be sung melodiously what is the need for other scriptures?)

Moreover, the *Upanishad*s represent the essence of the *Veda*s, which are the greatest and most flawless texts in the world.

If the Upanishads may by likened to a cow, *the Gita* is its milk.

Sarbopanisado gabo dogdha gopalanandanah
Partho batsam sudhirbhokta dugdham
Gitamrutam Mahan.

(All the Upanishads are a cow / Lord Krishna, the son of a cowherd/ Is the milkman/ Partha is the calf/ The learned drink the milk/ The Gita, the nectar of the milk.)

Like other philosophical texts, the *Gita* too describes the world as full of suffering.

Duhkhalagamashaswat.

(The world is an abode of suffering.)

The useful and easily practicable advice which the Gita offers regarding ways of attaining salvation will enable everyone to lead a virtuous life and earn merit. We wish to recite two *sloka*s from this text:

Raga biduesabimukteistu bisayanindri yescheran
Atmabaisheirbidheyatma prasada madhigachhati

Sarbadharman parityajya mamekam saranam braja
Aham tuam sarbapapebhyo mokhsayisyami ma suchah.

Which means that a person who has conquered his senses experiences a profound peace of mind even when he enjoys worldly pleasures through his disciplined senses purged of anger and envy. Leave all other faiths, and surrender yourselves to God. God will save you from all your sins. Do not worry.

Now, consider how easily accessible to ordinary people the Gita's messages are. How many people can make sense of the dry-as-dust, extremely intricate logic, chopping texts of philosophy? It is said: *Achintya Khalu ye bhabah na tat tarkeshu yojayet*. People who wish to attain salvation will not bother to argue about such incomprehensible subjects such as the soul, life after death, and God. Lord Budha has strictly forbidden such enquiries. Lord Chaitanya too has made a similar injunction: Krishna is easily reached through faith, but for logicians, he remains far away.

This is what we would like to say on the subject— There is no harm in studying philosophy if one's aim is to sharpen one's intellect. But we don't think it would be right to take them for religious scriptures. As a matter of fact, neither in India nor in any other nation, philosophical texts are ever given the status of religious scriptures.

Philosophers such as Kapila, Kanad, Jaimini, or western philosophers such as Mill Spencer and others in their attempts to prove the existence of God through logical argument have suffered the fate of becoming agnostics for they have been thwarted by the natural limits of human intellect. As the infallible *Veda*s assert— *na tatra chakshurgachhali na mano na bate*. That their attempts were doomed to failure, they should have realized. One more vital thing has also escaped their attention: it is beyond human intellect to discover the purpose behind the creation of even something so insignificant as a blade of grass growing under one's feet, or to determine its nature and qualities. In view of this, any attempt to discover the nature of God, who is the Lord of this limitless cosmos, through one's limited knowledge amounts to arrogant folly. To express skepticism about the existence of God, who has created the universe and pervades it, is certainly to deceive oneself. The Upanishads state: *Ishabasyamidam Sarbam Yatkincha Jagatyam Jagat*. Which means that God is present in every atom of the universe. A man who doubts his existence is no different from a child looking

around for its mother while lying on her lap. We normally come across four types of people: true believers in God; agnostics; victims of blind belief; and atheists. Those who study the proper religious texts or those who feel the presence of God in their beings through the influence of the advice of good teachers travel along the path of virtue. And those are actually unbelievers, who, coming under the influence of bad company or wrong counsel, and without looking for a manifestation of divinity, offer their worship to any object as if it is God. Some lucky few among the superstitious do worship the true God; but the world is full of people who worship snakes, cats, crocodiles, or worship some worthless beast or tree or object. The agnostic is many times more acceptable than the superstitious. Since the agnostics are engaged in a quest of God, there is always the possibility of their benighted hearts, which are tormented by doubts, being illuminated by the light of divine presence. This is because agnostics are learned persons and philosophers. If they could analyze the basic principle governing the occurrences in the cosmic world on their own without falling back on philosophical treatises whenever they feel assailed by doubts they would very easily see there the hand of an all - powerful infinitely wise and infinitely merciful God. One everywhere comes across agnostics who, having been bruised again and again in the whirlpool of worldly cares, have attained peace in the later part of their life surrendering themselves before the merciful almighty in utter distress. Of course, agnostics should never be considered in any way admirable. The *Gita* states, '*Samsaytama-binasyati*' but we claim that the agnostics are far superior to blind believers, for the agnostics bring harm only to their own souls, but the superstitious are dangerous enemies of the world; they cause it enormous damage. Because of them the earth has been drowned in the blood of millions of human beings again and again. They do not have the least hesitation to sacrifice a human being for securing their own well-being.

All the same, it is seen that the superstitious are benighted souls deserving of pity. But atheists do not deserve to be called humans. Like snakes, tigers, bandits they are not worthy of trust. There are many who never hesitate to do harm to fellow human beings or the whole society for attaining their own happiness. People abstain from

committing evil deeds out of a fear of God and punishment. The royal court punishes a misdeed only after obtaining evidence of guilt. In this case, it is not impossible for a cunning person to commit an evil deed in extreme secrecy and with great caution. If such a person believes that the great all-seeing Lord is watching his every deed and every thought from within the innermost recesses of his heart and that He metes out rewards and punishments for all our good and evil deed, he may hesitate to perform a misdeed. But such fear will be utterly lacking in an atheist. He could follow the precept '*Runam krutua ghrutam pibet*' (Borrow money and enjoy life) and can go further and say, '*Chouryam krutuam bhabet dharmadharmaphalah kutah*?'(Enjoy life even by stealing.)

* * *

Haribol Barik had the charge of attending to the pundits. Seeing how the brahmins were blabbering away, Barik feared that they would not stop until evening. He stood a short distance away from the conference and said in a loud voice within the pundits hearing. '*Haribol*! Our great pundits have not finished their learned discourses. Why did you lay out the leaf plates? Quick, take away the pots carrying *amruta rasabali* sweets and *kakara* cakes. The place is swarming with cats. Oh, what a disaster! They ate the cream from the curd pots. These have now all become impure, unclean.' It was already late in the afternoon. Everyone was starving. Many were thoroughly fed up. But no one dared open his mouth in such an august gathering. They were caught between a feeling for decorum and the pangs of hunger. When words of Haribol Barik fell on their ears, they got up in a commotion. A clamour for leaf plates and water followed.

Chapter Twenty-six
Writing of the Report

It was about the first watch of the night. Inside the palace Chandamani Dei sat on the verandah leaning against the parapet. Lalita— alias Chitrakala—ran her left hand over Chandamani's back, and fanned her with her right hand. The *nazar* and Dhaima were both seated by her side. On a brass lamp-stand, a wick burnt feebly. Natabara baboo began, 'Didn't you see, Dhaima? It is not a secret. Everyone everywhere now knows about it. If I had not come, would the funeral rites have been performed at all?' Lalita said, 'This is the reason why my lady urged my master to come here in such a hurry. No one dares tell you anything out of fear. But my lady has heard everything. Since everyone everywhere has heard about it, how could my lady not get to know? She has sent word through me to you that you should listen only to my master, and put your trust is no one else.' Natabara baboo added, 'Whatever had to be done has been done. Now the matter to be given thought is this: how to manage the zamindari. The two children have nothing else to survive on.' Dhaima replied, 'How can I manage the zamindari—what do I know? You call the children's mausa and the old record- keepers and decide what course of action would be the best.'

The *nazar* said derisively, 'Oh Dhaima. As they say, you are not my own, your grandfather is not my own. I have sent word to all of them six times over. But there is no response at all. Where would you find their mausa and the record-keepers? They have formed groups and speak to each other in whispers. If you call them over, they do everything to avoid you. They dare not speak out for fear of me. When I leave, you will get to know that the authorities in Cuttack have no faith in them. The sahib in Cuttack has passed orders that

the zamindari will remain in the charge of Chandamani. The cash will remain in your custody. Everything will be taken care of by the sahib. I will act only as a go-between and acquaint the sahib with your affairs and pass whatever he has to say on to you. That's all. I have no one to live for in this world. My heart treasures these two children, who are images my eyes dote on. In both our families it is only they who are left to offer oblations to the manes of our ancestors. They have to survive, grow up and become worthy men, or else how would they be equal to their royal responsibilities and look after their subjects? The sahib is the king of the realm. If you disobey his orders, do you think he will spare you?'

Lalita added, 'The sahib will fly into a rage if his orders are not carried out. There is no knowing what terrible things he will do. One must be very very careful.' Dhaima said, 'Forget everything else. Find out ways of saving these two children.'

The *nazar*— That is exactly what I am worrying about. Am I a mere keeper of gold and cash? May the sky shower nectar on the two children. May the time come soon when they sit on the throne with the royal umbrella shading them. For whom have I stored away so much wealth so carefully? The things I have heard has left me feeling thunder struck. Everyone now wants to merge the two estates. Children are as inconvenient as sand in their eyes.'

Saraswati Dei started at these words. Whatever powers of reflection she had still at her command now suddenly deserted her. Her head swam. A moment later she collected herself and asked, 'What are you saying, Nata, what are you saying? No. No. You may not have got it right. Could they ever form such a hideous scheme?'

The *nazar*—Dhaima, I won't say anything. It breaks my heart when I say these things. You will of course get to hear everything from other people. They can't throw dust in your eyes. It is only you of whom they are all afraid. Now, don't you understand a simple thing? Fourteen days—you can count them on your fingers—have gone by. Does anyone bother to consult you on any matter? Should they not have bothered to find out about what was going on inside the palace, at least for once? Think what sort of man is he who deserts you at a time of crisis? All right, let them not come to your help; at least they could have occasionally visited the cutcherry of the palace.

Lalita— I have made a tour of the palace three times over. Not even a five year old is to be seen anywhere. You have not heard of what went on at your very door-step, but your sister now knows everything.

Saraswati Dei— What has my sister said? The *nazar*'s face fell when he heard this. Neither Chitra nor any of her forefathers had heard of even the name of his village. She had come accompanying him straight from Cuttack. Now she might make a tactless observation and spoil everything.

But seeing his face, Chitrakala easily read his thoughts. She continued, 'Yesterday your sister told the *nazar* many things about many important matters. After all, I'm a woman; I don't understand these things. What can I say to you about them? You ask our master. He will explain to you everything. There is one thing your sister has asked me to tell you. You should act according to our master's advice and not trust any one else.' Her words made the *nazar* exceedingly well pleased. He thought to himself, 'I have Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth as well as Saraswati, the goddess of learning with me.' He said, 'Dhaima. Why worry about these things? Let them do what they like. Our *dharma* will take perfect care of us. If we remain careful, no enemy could do us any harm. And let us not forget one thing— the sahib is our guardian. All these jackals will run away and hide in their holes at the mere sight of a lion like him. However, if we do not do as the sahib says, we will be utterly undone.'

Saraswati Dei was a clever woman; she understood the ways of the world. She was a very good judge of character and could figure a man out by simply looking at and listening to him. Although she was a simple and innocent person, no one could ever deceive her. But today all her powers of discernment had been defeated by Natabara Das's craftiness. And this was so because the safety of the children had completely occupied her thoughts. Nothing else mattered to her in the least. She had no energy left to think of anything else. Her sole concern was finding ways to save three helpless creatures. There was another thing: However old Natabara might be, in Saraswati Dei's eyes he was but a child. She had brought him up lovingly when he was a baby. Why should she be cautious in her dealings with him? And what? A plot to ruin the children! Whatever

wits she had about her, now deserted her. Saraswati Dei know very well what sort of men Chhotray and the record-keepers were, and that Natabara was an unscrupulous young man was equally well known to her. But what of it? Now she felt utterly confused. Whenever one is in danger or just before one is overtaken by it, one's mind gets agitated, and one fails to foresee the consequences of one's own actions. Goddess Sita knew very well that Lakshman had sacrificed everything for her and yet under the circumstances she expressed her utter lack of trust in him on account of something absolutely trivial. And even someone of the stature of Yudhisthir, the incarnation of *dharma*, lost his wife Draupadi. It is clear that man is a slave of circumstances, which at times make him lose even his common sense.

Saraswati Dei found herself totally incapable of thinking. Her sister had sent her word; and there was the instruction of the sahib. She said tearfully, 'Nata! Follow the sahib's orders. I leave everything to *dharma*. Let His will be done. Tell the sahib, he should have pity on the two children.' Seeing Saraswati Dei in such distress, Natabara felt overjoyed. He had achieved his objectives. Who would not feel elated by the success of one's manoeuvres? The death throes of a wounded deer always gives pleasure to a tiger and a tigress. Natabara and Chitra now exchanged looks. This exchange was a sign of the joy they felt at having emerged successful in their plot. Natabara Das had got a report drafted and brought it with him. It had to be signed by Chandamani. But Saraswati Dei's pledging and Chitrakala's persuasion proved unavailing. It appeared as if Chandamani's mind had drawn a blank and her faculties had become numb. At last, her seal was set upon the report and at the nazar's urgent bidding, Saraswati Dei wrote out Chandamani's name with great reluctance.

The craving hearts of Natabara and Chitra now overflowed with joy. But when the nazar took leave, he pulled a long face and said, 'Dhaima, Beware. Never allow the children to go out. I will commit suicide if anyone says a single harsh word to them. Don't ever forget that they are my life blood.'

Chapter Twenty-seven
The Packet of Gold Ornaments

Tonight everyone was found sitting on the verandah at the same time that they had got together yesterday night. After talking of this and that for a time, Natabara Das came to the point, ' Dhaima. We did everything that was to be done. I am now leaving for Cuttack. You know that my hands are tied for I am a government servant and I can't come as often as I would like to. A thought crossed my mind; so I came to share it with you. You are incoherent with grief; Chanda seems insensible of everything. I think that it would be a good thing if the gold ornaments are kept in safe custody. You may look upon your maidservants as members of your own family; but who can resist the lure of gold and silver? You have no use for these ornaments, and as for me, I am not going to wear them. But our children will need these in future when times are bad. We would fail in our duty if we do not take special care of these. What do the children know after all? It is our responsibility.'

Even in the face of a terrible danger, a woman can never completely overcome her weakness for jewellery, and Dhaima was particularly disinclined to show the priceless ornaments of the palace to Natabara of all people. She said, 'They are lying somewhere. On that inauspicious day I had flung Chand's ornaments under her bedstead. I don't know what happened to them.' Natabara said, 'That is exactly what I am telling you. Unless we guard them carefully now, they will all be lost. You must have patience. Calm down. No, No. Find out where the ornaments are and keep them in a safe place. I would have gone away. But the sahib has repeatedly told me that he would be very angry with me if I do not keep the ornaments in a safe palace before I leave.' Lalita joined him, saying, 'Yes, yes. The

sahib has said this very thing. The valuables are lying scattered all over— I have seen them myself. The maidservants and all sorts of people are making a beeline to the bedroom. Tell me who keeps a watch there? Keeping the ornaments in a safe place can wait; just find out where they are. Or else what will you say to the sahib about them when he asks you?'

The *nazar* was very pleased with what Lalita alias Chitrakala said. He considered himself extremely fortunate. At that time, a hope sitting in his heart whispered to him, 'Keep at it. You will become a millionaire in the fullness of time.'

Saraswati Dei was outmanoeuvred by Natabara for the second time. She and Chitrakala were both of them clever women. But the cleverness of the former was untainted and pure and was employed to ensure the well-being of people. Chitra's cleverness, on the other hand, was utterly selfish and dangerous. At the present moment Saraswati Dei's mind had been distracted by a multitude of misfortunes. As a result, she had lost the power of foreseeing future consequences of her actions. But Chitra's crafty mind was alert and hard at work. And victory was therefore easily assured for it. The nazar went on, 'Dhaima, the sahib has told me again and again that all the ornaments should be put in a packet, and the packet should be kept inside a safe, which will have two locks. You will keep the key to one of the locks. The other will be kept in an iron safe at Cuttack. This will be guarded by four sepoys carrying guns on their shoulders, who would be on their feet all day and would not allow even a fly to slip in.' Dhaima did not say anything for a moment. Then she thought up something and, without saying anything, rose to her feet, a lamp in her hand. She said, 'Come, Nata, come' and led him into the bedchamber of the late zamindar. 'Go, under the bedstead and gather the ornaments lying under it,' she said. While picking up the ornaments the nazar looked each one over very carefully. The diamonds, pearls and the precious stones with which the ornaments were overlain glittered in the light of the lamp like fireflies. It was as if they flooded the *nazar*'s heart with bright light. He said, 'Dhaima! Give me whatever ornaments are lying elsewhere. I'll put them in the same packet'. Dhaima opened a big box, and brought out a large number of ornaments. The *nazar* put these into a packet made of a

piece of silk cloth. Dhaima could not bear to look at the ornaments; she only glanced at the *nazar*'s busy hands. A large safe was secured with two locks. In Dhaima's presence the *nazar* checked the locks by pulling them hard a couple of times. He quickly came out of the room after handing her a key.

Dhaima slipped the key under a pillow on the bed and left the room in a hurry for she thought that Nata should be shown the way in the dark with the help of a lamp. A pair of eyes were watching when Saraswati Dei put the keys under the pillow through a chink in the door.

The *nazar* took his leave. Showing the way with a lamp, Lalita accompanied him as far as the palace gate. They exchanged looks and gave each other smiles. It was as if communication between them took place through their eyes.

Chapter Twenty-eight

The *Nazar* Leaves for Cuttack

The third day after the ornaments were put away in the safe, the news spread throughout fort Naripur that the *nazar* had left for Cuttack at night in a hurry after receiving a letter carrying an urgent message from the sahib. The maidservant, Lalita who had accompanied him, had also gone with him. The information that a letter had arrived from the sahib in Cuttack was given by a peon who had been hired by the *nazar*. No one knew about it until the very moment of the *nazar*'s departure. The chief watchman of the palace told the *paik*s that the *nazar* came to the palace gate three to four times between evening and midnight before he left for Cuttack. He repeatedly advised the *paik*s to remain wide awake while keeping watch, and told them not to let anyone get into the palace. It seemed as if he was expecting someone to come to him from the palace. After about six hours, a woman emerged from the palace. It appeared as if she carried a packet under her arm. The *nazar* collected it from her and set off for Cuttack. No one heard the shouts of palanquin bearers or saw the light of torches.

Chapter Twenty-nine
Submission of the Report

The name of the Collector of Cuttack was Mr Dawson. Many English officers are regarded as incarnations of virtue by their clerks and the ordinary public. Our Dawson sahib was one of these. Although he was an experienced senior officer he had not only no understanding of the deceitful nature of his clerks, he did not even try to understand it. The way the sahib viewed the matter was this: these servants are poor people. How could they survive if one looks for their weaknesses? In the sahib's opinion, the *nazar*, Natabara Das was an extremely reliable, intelligent and hard-working person. The sahib's family included the memsahib, a young daughter, and two little boys. There was always too much to do in his bungalow, and the memsahib found it difficult to manage all by herself. But so what? Her problem was easily solved: Natabara baboo got everything done. It was therefore natural that the memsahib was very partial to him. Whenever anything was to be done, she would call out 'Byaboo, Byaboo'. On many days, the *nazar* remained present at the bungalow from early morning till ten o' clock and saw to it that all the household work was done smoothly. The memsahib had obtained proof of another of his abilities: the *nazar* brought chickens, goats, eggs, horse feed etc. at a much lower price than that asked for by her *khansamas* or *chaprassis*. For this, in her opinion, the *nazar* was a very clever and reliable man. But the fact was, all the provisions for the sahib's household were obtained at half their actual cost or absolutely free from mofussil zamindars. The arrangement benefited both the sahib and the zamindars. And our *nazar* was not one who did anything that would not bring him gain. To give something at half its cost or totally free did not hurt the zamindar at all if the nazar's recommendation

to the sahib could get things fixed for them. But the sahib, for his part, remained totally unaware of these goings-on. And the *khansmas*, *chaparassis* and the clerks were all ranged against the *nazar*. Who would not get upset if someone made impossible their chances of earning a little money on the side? But what could they do? How would they dare speak against a person who was in the good book of the sahib himself?

The *nazar* arrived at the sahib's bungalow very early in the morning the day after he returned from fort Naripur. Going there early every morning was part of his daily routine. But today he looked different: his face was pale, his hair dishevelled and the clothes he was wearing were dirty. Seeing his face one would get the impression that he had gone without food for several days. His eyes were swollen. Twice or thrice he put his head around a pillar and peeped in. He was waiting for an opportune moment. The Sahib had given a blanket instruction that the *nazar* was free to meet him whenever and wherever he wanted without prior notice and tell the sahib whatever he had to say. But so what? The *nazar* was a cautious man and he understood the ways of the world. Just because the sahib liked him, it would not be a good thing to get carried away and barge into the sahib's presence whenever he felt like it and say whatever came to his mind. One should always read the sahib's moods correctly and act accordingly. And the *nazar* knew very well how to humour the sahib.

It was well past tea time. The memsahib, a needle, thread and a piece of cloth in her hand, was sitting on a swing on the verandah and rocking gently. It was as if her fingers were always itching—they would not find rest unless they wrote or sewed something.

The sahib was relaxing in an armchair and reading a newspaper. The two were talking merrily and having great fun. The moment seemed just right. The *nazar* took the name of his tutelary deity and emerged from behind the pillar. Proceeding gingerly he appeared before the sahib and bending low, saluted the couple four to five times. While saluting, fingers of his right hand nearly touched the ground. The sahib enquired, 'What's the matter, *nazar* baboo?'

All conversation between them was carried out in English. For the benefit of our readers will render everything into Oriya. The

nazar saluted again and said, as if he was labouring under great distress, 'My sister's husband, the zamindar of fort Naripur, Samanta Pratap Udit Malla Uttararay has passed away. My sister, Chandamani Dei is now a widow.' While mentioning this, tears flowed freely from his eyes. The baboo kept wiping them with his handkerchief from time to time. He could not go on and began panting. The sahib consoled him, saying tenderly, 'That I know already, *nazar* baboo. I will now place the estate under court of wards and sort everything out. Your sister will have nothing to worry about.'

The *nazar* baboo again saluted them twice and said, 'My sister, Chandamani Dei, has paid her respects to your lordship and the memsahib and said that you are now her father and her mother. She has further submitted that the income from her estate is a meagre one, and there are too many mouths to feed in the palace. The expenses are heavy. She has got into debt to meet the expenses of the funeral. If the estate is placed under court of wards, a lot of money will have to be spent on the manager and the office. The loan can never be repaid. Chandamani wants to manage the estate as record-keeper on behalf of her minor children.'

The sahib asked, 'But she is a Hindu woman. How could she manage affairs outside the house? Does she know how to read and write?'

The *nazar* replied, 'My lord. Chandamani is not like other Hindu women. She knows all about running an estate. My sister's husband, who was the zamindar, did not bother about his own affairs. He used to spend all his time playing games of dice, listening to song-contests, and sleeping. If the estate has survived and is doing well, it is chiefly on account of the exertions of Chandamani. She looked after everything; she inspected the accounts kept by the employees of the estate. If an official harassed a tenant, Chandamani gave the tenant justice after listening to his grievances. Again, she is very keen to make the estate prosper. She has set up a minor school in the fort, and she wants to set up two more. Had this terrible thing not happened, the schools would have been functioning by now. All arrangements had been made to found a hospital but they had to be cancelled suddenly. Chandamani is very good at reading and writing. Please have a look at the report she has written out.' Saying this, the *nazar*

took out a report from his pocket and handed it to the sahib. The sahib glanced over the report and exclaimed, 'Is this Chandamani's handwriting? How beautiful and clear the letters look!' The *nazar* said, 'Chandamani herself has written this report. Here is her signature. She writes down the accounts of the estate by her own hand. She counts the money paid into the estate's treasury, which she keeps in her own custody. She depends on nobody. If my government job allows me any time, I will help her. For that I will not take a salary. My nephews are but little children. How could I take their money?'

The memsahib was listening to everything the *nazar* said. She now put in, 'You see Dawson, I know the Hindus are very cruel to women. They confine them in dark rooms like beasts. You better give some power to Chandamani in order that she may be enlightened.' Nothing could be more to the *nazar*'s taste. Everything was settled. The *nazar*'s tearful prayer, the account of Chandamani's intelligence and her proven ability in managing her estate had already rendered the sahib extremely well disposed to help him. After the strong recommendation— you may call it an order— from the memsahib whose lotus feet could well adorn the heads of our Hindu Gods, nothing more was needed to clinch the issue. With great promptness the sahib ordered, 'Submit this report in the office.' The *nazar* retraced his steps with profound reverence. If someone had cared to look closely into the *nazar*'s face at this moment, it would have presented to him the image of a cloud suddenly flooded with moonlight.

Chapter Thirty
The Report is Approved

It was about midday. The *munshis* and *peshkars* were busy arranging files on a bench lying in front of the seat of the judge in court number one. The two *chaprassis* tried to appear busy shouting 'Quiet, quiet'. The sahib arrived and ordered the *peshkar,* 'Bring the file.' The *nazar* was standing before the seat of the judge. He saluted and handed out the report. Before the *peshkar* had read out four lines from the report, the sahib said, 'Oh. That is the report of zamindar Chandamani Dei. Now take down my order. Chandamani Dei is hereby appointed as the assignee on behalf of her minor sons. She will remain responsible for the management of the zamindari. The government appoints *Nazar* Natabara Das to supervise the management of the estate and inspect the work of its employees. However, he will not receive any salary for this.' The order struck the *peshkar* like a thunderbolt. Nothing was a secret to him. He knew that Chandamani was only a pretext. From now on the real master of the zamindari would be none other than Natabara Das. He was going to say something to the sahib, but the sahib, cut him short, 'Enough. I have already passed the orders. Bring me another file.' How could the *peshkar* write out the order? His hands seemed to rebel against him. Chandamani Dei's name was but a cover— the real master was now Natabara Das. The *peshkar* could foresee vividly where all this would eventually lead to: not only the children's lives, this great family would be completely ruined. And this was not a matter which concerned someone else; it touched his own family. The *peshkar* had anticipated that the zemindari would be placed under court of wards. Since that was the rule, what was the real reason behind the sahib's giving such a strange order so hastily without going deep into the matter? He was utterly

perplexed. If he had blocked the *nazar*'s from the very beginning, and brought everything to the sahib's notice, a terrible thing like this would never have come to pass. The *peshkar* now thought to himself that it was his own laxity which brought all this about. Feelings of guilt consumed him. When the *nazar* created problems in the palace, he had assured everyone, ' Let this fellow do whatever he likes. Don't tell him anything. The sahib will place the zamindari under court of wards'. What would he now tell people of the estate? He felt he would die of shame. He could not say even a word about this matter to the sahib— this brought him unbearable grief. Feeling utterly helpless, he wrote out the sahib's order. No other alternative was open to him. The *nazar* looked at him triumphantly out of the corner of his eyes while he was writing the sahib's order on the report and felt elated.

One of these two persons was sensitive to the suffering of others, and wished for everyone's well-being. The other was utterly selfish, and absolutely willing to destroy all the happiness of someone else to ensure the gratification of his desire. He was exceedingly delighted at the prospect of achieving his selfish ends through unfair means. Today, the first person stood defeated, humiliated, and stunned into listlessness in front of the so-called seat of the justice. Those among the spectators and the employees in the court who knew what had happened were all shocked into silence. But for the law court this presented no unusual spectacle.

Chapter Thirty-one
Chandamani's Plight

The Collector sahib placed the management of the zamindari in Chandamani's care on being persuaded of her worthiness, deligence and such other qualities. But, as for Chandamani, words failed to describe her plight. She was wretched beyond belief. The death of her husband had left her stupefied, as it were. She stared, but her eyes were dim. She did not blink. There was no knowing if she had gone blind. She would not utter a word, and all her limbs seemed listless. She was always very fond of curd, which she had the habit of taking with all her meals. But now she found it absolutely tasteless. It now took Dhaima a very long time to make her swallow even a handful of mashed rice mixed with curd. Food would not go down her throat. Had Dhaima given up, Chandamani would not have remained alive. She lay quiet and motionless in one place. A year after her first misfortune, she fell a victim to yet another affliction. At times she would groan with pain and collapse. First her hands and legs would shiver, then she would lose consciousness. All the reputed *vaidya*s living in the neighbourhood had been hard at work to find a cure. But they were yet to diagnose the disease. Some of them suggested it was a case of epilepsy; others diagnosed it as *vekla bata*, and for some *vaidya*s it was a case of *jhimijhimiabata*. Nostrums of all kinds were prepared and administered, but to no avail. If anything, the treatment aggravated the illness. Dhaima was tired of sending messengers carrying letters to the *nazar*. At last, a *vaidya* arrived from Cuttack. He felt the pulse of the patient's left hand and declared that it was a case of *ghumuria bata*. He brought out three black tablets and said, 'Mix these with honey and the juice of ginger, and make the patient drink it. As soon as she takes the potion immerse

her in water and let her have a large bowl of soaked rice and curd.' Dhaima had nursed many invalids. Somehow, this *vaidya's* prescription left her unconvinced. She sent him away.

The *peshkar* kept himself regularly informed of Chandamani's condition. But he was helpless. He was a government servant, after all. And a wicked man like the *nazar* stood between him and Chandamani. But soon it became clear to him that a life would be destroyed while he just looked on. Let whatever happen, he must act. He arrived in fort Naripur bringing with him an experienced British surgeon and an assistant surgeon. The doctors examined the patient and concluded that it was a case of melancholia. At last, proper medical treatment commenced. After about three months, the patient's condition improved a little. Dhaima persuaded her to eat with her own hands, but she experienced difficulty in swallowing her food. She also recovered a little of her mental agility. To Dhaima's queries she would respond with a 'yes' or a 'no'.

The *nazar* came to know of the medical treatment Chandamani had received. He went around telling people within the *peshkar*'s hearing, ' He went there with a doctor. Of course, we all know what had come of it: again the same doctor has been called. Someone will have to do some explaining in future.' But the *nazar* was no fool. There was nothing he could do when the doctor sahib was in charge of the patient. It was none of his intention to do anything. Who knew? One false move and a terrible consequence might follow. He was merely showing off when he threatened to ask the *peshkar* to explain.

No one was sure how much money was spent on the doctors, and who paid it. But later it was said that a sum of thousand rupees was taken out of the treasury of the estate to pay for the visit of the *vaidya* sent by the *nazar*.

Chapter Thirty-two
Dhaima's Sense of Duty

Virtues such as fortitude, tolerance, affection and filial love are to be found in larger measure in women than in men. Moreover, special circumstances cause these inherent qualities to blossom forth in all their splendour. Saraswati had lost her mother when a child. Her husband disappeared soon after her marriage. She had thus been used to suffering. So much so, she seemed utterly indifferent to it. She deemed it her supreme duty to help others and nurse the sick. Doing this gave her pleasure. She did not live for her own sake the joys and sorrows of other people affected her as if they were her own. She would completely forget herself while attending to someone in sick bed, and found a strange kind of peace. What could a woman like her, who was utterly selfless, lack? In fact, she always remained cheerful. Her face never showed a trace of sadness or discontent. In her eyes, nothing in the world could be more precious than Chandamani. On Chandamani she lavished all her affection, all her filial love. Anything which brought Chandamani happiness overjoyed her. For Chandamani, too, Dhaima was her everything. She owed her education and her training to none other than Dhaima. In everything, she remained devoted to her and followed her advice. But in two areas of conduct she seemed unwilling or unable to obey Dhaima. It is seen that, in many instances, human nature defeats instruction. When this occurred in Chandamani's case, she incurred Dhaima's displeasure. Dhima felt that, since Chandamani was a zamindar's wife, she should behave to her maidservants in a manner befitting her position. She should inspire feelings of awe and deference in them. But Chandamani looked upon her maidservants as kith and kin. She sat down to play with them, when Dhaima was

out of the way. And she talked to all of them sweetly, with a smile. A smile always played on her face. Whenever a maidservant fell ill, she would visit her ten times a day. If a maidservant disobeyed her or talked back to her, she would never punish her; she would only walk away, smiling. But such behaviour on her part greatly annoyed Dhaima.

Land revenue and other payments from a large village assigned to Chandamani came straight to her own account. Besides this, she received a lot of money by way of gift from the cutcherry. Whenever a maidservant brought Chandamani this money, she would throw it before Dhaima and blithely walked away, without a care. This vexed Dhaima to no end, and she would say, 'Is this how you would manage the affairs of the palace? Your household? You are so careless, one day a wicked person will come and rob you of all your ornaments and cash. Will I always be around to keep these in safe custody?' Whenever these words were addressed to Chandamani, her smile appeared sweeter still.

The misfortunes which had overtaken Chandamani completely demoralized Dhaima. The darkness, which suddenly envolops a bright light seems terribly oppressive. Everything has a limit. It had appeared as if Dhaima was at the end of her tether. Only her strong unshakeable faith in God had enabled her to survive. Now she recovered a little of her earlier strength. Only two things mattered to her since the day dangers ass ailed her world: Protecting three lives, and regular worship of the almighty. Nothing else seemed of any consequence to her these days.

Chapter Thirty-three
Gokul Patanaik's Letter

I seek shelter at the feet of Lord Jagannath. May Sri Gurudev save me.

To His Majesty Sri Sri Samanta Baboo *Nazar* Natabar Das, an ocean of glory, the protector of cows and brahmins, and who is charitable like Karna, Gokul Patanaik, Karji Chakale, Naripur in Cuttack District submits humbly that this servant of yours has been discharging his duties properly till recently. However, these days, it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage things. Sources of income have completely dried up. Under the dispensation of the late zamindar the *chakala karji* used to receive a monthly salary of twenty rupees. Your Majesty had raised it to thirty rupees and had ordered that your obedient servant would take five rupees from your majesty, and write a receipt for thirty. Your servant had been ordered to collect the balance of twentyfive rupees from the tenants. I had acted on that order, and all went smoothly for two years. However these days discharging my duties has become extremely difficult. I mention below a few sources from which income used to be derived:

1. Whenever a quarrel broke out among the tenants, money from both the parties in the quarrel was collected.
2. Money was collected from both the parties in a partition suit or a suit involving debtors and creditors.
3. Tenants were made to pay a certain amount for taking land records, receipts and towards maintaining your majesty's cutcherry, *kharadapani*, *bishodhini* etc.

Your Majesty may take a look at the accounts of the last two years. No income now accrues from any source. Your obedient servant finds it difficult to make both ends meet these days. The mischief

made by one man has put us in dire straits. This man's name is Haribol Barik. His real name is Chatura Barik. As he is in the habit of saying '*Haribol*' whenever he utters anything, people call him Haribol Barik. He lives in Nijagarh, but he does not render services as a barber in his village. His brother Satura Barik serves the villagers instead. Haribol has set himself up as a physician and is highly regarded in twenty villages around. Although he is a mere barber, people treat him with respect and do as he says. Whenever a meeting is called to settle some dispute in the village, the villagers make a point of inviting him. If a quarrel takes place in someone's house he comes to Haribol for advice. This man is a great mischief-maker; he has managed to win everyone over with his tact. Now-a-days, whenever a riot breaks out in the village or a family dispute occurs, or when a matter is taken to a law court, he rushes in uninvited and sorts out the problems. When your obedient servant sends *paik*s to summon villagers involved in these disputes, they refuse to come. No one now cares for the peons and *paik*s working under your obedient servant. Your Majesty had introduced a law relating to cows straying into rice fields. Last year, this law helped us make a good income. But these days no one brings cows straying into rice fields to your obedient servant. Your Majesty had instructed your servant not to give receipts to wealthy and wicked tenants after collecting land revenue from them. This is what your servant has been doing for the last few years; but now, acting on Haribol's evil counsel, no one now pays land revenue unless they get a receipt. Under the influence of the same wicked barber, no one obeys your obedient servant. I am afraid of bringing an incident to Your Majesty's attention. I dare not write the insulting things he said against Your Majesty in the presence of so many people in the main path of Nijagarh village.

Managing our affairs will become impossible unless this scoundrel is taught a lesson and unless his wings are clipped. When the moneylender Hari Sahu of this village had disobeyed Your Majesty's orders, a case was filed against him and he was arrested on the strength of a warrant. He was let off only after he paid a fine of two hundred rupees to Your Majesty. Your obedient servant may kindly be allowed to file a false case against this barber. The court peons will, of course, do Your Majesty's bidding. If they arrest him

without serving him summons and parade him around the villages he will be taught a lesson. People here think that one who goes to jail loses his caste. Hari Sahu had to spend three thousand rupees to get accepted back into his caste. This barber is quite well-to-do; he owns ten pairs of bullocks. His pockets are never empty. Filing a lawsuit against him will serve two purposes: we will collect a fine from him, and the tenants will again be brought under our control. Your Majesty may kindly allow your servant to file such a case soon. I have nothing more to say. I may kindly be forgiven for writing this letter.

Your obedient servant
Gokuli Patanaik
Sana 1080 sal
Karji Chakale
Nijagarh   Fort Naripur

P.S. I pray that Your Majesty would be so kind as to raise your servant's salary keeping in view the conditions prevailing in the mofussil area. Your servant is willing to take fifteen rupees and give a receipt for thirty. As other *karji*s work in interior villages they do not face any difficulties. I have brought the matter to Your Majesty's kind notice.

Chapter Thirty-four
The Situation in the Palace

Ever since Uttararay passed away, Dhaima never left Chandamani's side. Chandamani's eldest son went to school. On Dhaima's orders a faithful servant, Madan Mahakud, always accompanied him to school. The boy was very keen on his studies; he would always be seen poring over a book in hand. He was but a child, yet he was now able to understand his own situation and that of his mother. These days, after school, he would come and sit beside his mother or Dhaima. He would turn the pages of a book or read it silently. He would never disobey Dhaima. He used to be very obstinate earlier and would insist on getting whatever he wanted; but he was completely changed now. He would often look at his mother, break down and burst into tears. However, his younger brother busied himself in play; he was too young to understand anything.

Dhaima had found a breathing space. Chandamani now made sense of what was said to her, and made replies if Dhaima said something to her. However, the smile, which used to light up their faces earlier, had vanished. So had the joy that used to make their faces glow. The shadow of grief had darkened their faces. It seemed as if dark clouds had concealed the moon. Feelings in one's heart find themselves reflected in one's face. Words are but the echoes of the vibrations of one's heartstrings. Chandamani now kept herself busy every day, dusting, drying and neatly arranging the books, which were so dear to her late husband. She would clean the ivory clogs of her husband with the end border of her sari, touch them to her forehead and put them reverentially on a wooden seat as if these were deities. Dhaima had never before gone beyond the inner courtyard and the pond, which lay at the back of the palace. One day, in the afternoon,

she went to the *sudder* cutcherry and found that the double doors of the eight-foot high lion gate had been kept locked. Two *paiks*, who guarded them, lay asleep in one corner of the forecourt of the cutcherry, one using his arm as a pillow and the other dozing beside him. Wisps of smoke rose from the fat fire pot. Half a cartload of ash and half a basketful of cigarette butts lay beside them. The cutcherry, which used to be thronged with a crowd day and night and which used to be always full of bustle, now lay absolutely quiet and deserted. The corners of the house were filled with cobwebs and soot. The floor was littered with all manner of dirt: pigeon droppings, bat droppings, and dust. Pigeons had built their nests with twigs, dry leaves and straw on the cross beams under the roof and raised their families undisturbed. A flock of pigeons wandered about in the courtyard cooing. Plaster had peeled off the wall in bucketfuls. At places, it had got swollen, cracked and was on the point of falling off. The outer courtyard lay buried under knee-deep dirt: the wind had swept in dry leaves from somewhere. An oblong record room, three to four cross beams supporting its roof, adjoined the cutcherry. In it stood open cupboards full of sheaves of palm leaves. These were records of the zamindari stored over generations. Termites had now reduced these to a mound. A deep sigh escaped Dhaima when her eyes fell on these. The paiks suddenly noticed Dhaima. They came running to her, and threw themselves at her feet. They had been given land grants. All the servants, who were paid a salary, had left the palace.

Dhaima looked away and hurriedly left the place. She went all over the palace and realised that the situation was equally bad everywhere. Houses as big as elephant stables stood eerily empty. One would feel scared to enter them alone even during daytime. Wherever one went one got the impression that this was the dumping site for the droppings and the broken nests of all the sparrows, pigeons and bats of the world. It seemed as if these birds took turns to fill this place with their chirping and cooing.

The servants' quarters of the palace was home to as many as ten old women, young women and girls. Some of these came from families, which had served the palace for three generations; some others were daughters and daughters-in-law from good families in

distress; a few others were distant relations and distant relations of other distant relations. For generations, the Uttararays provided food and shelter to women from good families in their zamindari, who fell upon bad days, and treated them as members of their own family. The servants' quarter was always full of bustle. This might lead a stranger to think that he was close to a busy weekly market. It seems as if the Lord has ordained that the maidservants' quarter and the nests of tree sparrows would always be full of commotion. But since Uttararay's death even this place had become absolutely quiet. The death of their provider, the misfortune of their mistress, and the grief, which had overcome Dhaima, combined to overwhelm them. They had nothing to eat and lay half-dead in their sheds. Where would they find the energy to make any noise now? They only writhed like fish out of water. All the doors were closed. The grove and Chandamani's living quarters were out of bounds for them. Where would they go? And why should they go? In the entire world they had no place even to stand on. Many of them had lived in the palace since their childhood and did not know that a world outside the palace existed. Again, their lot was different from that of the maidservants serving in the palaces of other kings or zamindars. They had been well provided for in Uttarray's palace and lived very comfortably there. But now their good days had suddenly come to an end. On an appointed day every month they used to receive their share of rice from the palace storekeeper. They also received a little ready cash to enable them to meet their expenses on their toiletries. Once every three months, each one of them was given a new saree. A small pucca temple, the abode of Lord Sitaram, stood in the servants' quarter. Two old maidservants were assigned the task of offering worship to the deity. Every day, in the evening, one of them would recite two cantos from the *Bhagabat* in the temple. Of course, except for a few old women, no one went to the temple to listen to the recital. Since three generations of Uttararays were pious people of unblemished character, the palace had remained an unpolluted place. The maidservants used to lead a happy and contented life there. Their happiness had increased with the arrival of their new mistress. She was remarkably indifferent to her own well-being; she would never bother to keep her sarees or her jewellery in a safe place; but she

would never rest unless she found out about how everyone in the servants' quarter was doing. She was often heard saying that, since she was responsible for so many people, she would commit a sin if she did not look after them properly. It was also observed that, in relation to matters concerning herself, she was like a child; but, when it came to taking care of the maidservants, she was every inch a responsible woman ordering the affairs of the palace. The maidservants had now no one to look after them. A few had saved a little rice from their provisions and kept it in a basket in their sheds. Except those who were utterly extravagant, the others had also saved a little money. In a cane basket they had stored old used clothes. With this they somehow survived for three years. But they had now reached the end of their tether. Their sarees were torn in many places and had been mended. They went without food most of the time. They were reduced to skeletons and one could count the bones on their ribcage. The wind disarranged their untidy, matted hair. They had become so skinny that one could draw a line on their body with the help of a chalk. Although they served there as maidservants because they were victims of misfortune, many of them in fact came from good families. As they had good company and had been kept under strict supervision, their character had remained untainted. One afternoon, a few old women made everyone assemble before the temple and said, 'Listen. You can very well see for yourselves what has happened to the family to which we owe our lives. Our mistress, who used to come twice every day to find out if we had eaten or not, now lies unconscious. If the Lord takes pity on us, He will give her strength and our misery will come to an end in a day. Let us all lie here in this temple. Let us not bring disgrace to this great family. Let us not consign our own families into hell. We should never step out of the palace. Let all of us pray for our mistress. May the Lord Almighty shower honey on her two children – the young princes. Take a pledge in the presence of the Lord.' They all took the pledge, crying. After this the maidservant in charge of the store put a big lock on the door giving access to the grove. No one was allowed to step out of the palace.

The door leading from the servants' quarter to the zemindar's wing in the house had also been closed: the lady of the house was

not to be disturbed. The *kavirajas* had warned that her condition would deteriorate if there was any noise. Today, in the morning, Dhaima opened this door and went into the maidservants' quarter. The moment they saw her, they all, old women and young girls alike, surrounded her and wailed. Someone held her feet, someone else held her in a tight embrace and a few women pulled her hands. They all wailed loudly. Hunger had enfeebled them; so they did not have any energy left to lament their lot. After a while some of them nearly fainted away. After crying their hearts out many sat down and gasped for breath. The same kind of grief had been expressed on the day the zamindar had passed away. Grief was simmering inside every heart all these days. Today it seemed as if it brimmed over. Their shabby clothes and their pitiable physical appearance left Dhaima petrified. Tears kept rolling down her cheeks. Earlier, no one ever saw tears in Dhaima's eyes. But, of late, tears welled up in her eyes even when she was even slightly upset. However, she would never wail loudly. After a while Dhaima collected herself. She had no difficulty in forming an idea of how these maidservants were getting on. She took a good look at each one of them and motioned to them to stop crying. Some of them were approaching Dhaima to tell her of their suffering, but the maidservant in charge of the store dissuaded them by winking at them. She whispered into the ears of some, 'Don't say anything at all.'

Chapter Thirty-five

Sadhu Sahu, the Moneylender

After coming back from the maidservants' quarters, Dhaima closed the doors of the treasury, and sat quietly there for a while. She had no problem in bearing the pain that tormented herself, but the suffering of others she found unbearable. Her heart had dried up and turned into stone. May be for this reason, or because she thought that if she broke down and wept the children would give way to despair, she had never let herself shed tears. But, as she sat quietly today, her eyes melted and tears flowed ceaselessly. Usually it was she who comforted everyone whenever they were in distress. Now that she was herself grieving who would solace her? A little while later she composed herself. She looked at her own saving box. It lay empty. She recalled that Nata had taken all the money to Cuttack promising that he would send it back in four or five days' time. But he did not do so. 'It seemed unlikely that he would ever return the money. Whenever I wrote to him asking for it he would send the same message: "Uttararay's debts have not been repaid yet. The tenants have ganged up and are refusing to pay their taxes." Oh God. The talk of debts in this house, of all places? But, if things are so bad already, how could debts make them any worse? But the maidservants are dying before my own eyes. How could I commit the sin of letting such a terrible thing happen? I alone am responsible for bringing so much misery upon everyone. How could I do such a stupid thing: 'Why did I let myself be taken in by Nata?' It seemed as if the maidservants crowded her field of vision— she could not see anything else. All she saw was their half-naked skinny figures. She felt her neck and took out the necklace of beaten gold. She held it up with her right hand for a while, gazing at it. A few drops of tears again fell

from her eyes. 'My elder sister had taken ill when she gave birth to Chandamani. I had nursed her then. When she got well she removed this necklace and slipped it round my neck. I tried to dissuade her and took it out of my neck. My brother-in-law who stood close by, smiling, said, "O goddess Saraswati. I salute thee. Do accept this necklace, which would beautify your bare neck. No one offers me a necklace. If anyone did I would like to wear it." I had said, "Take it then, brother-in-law. Put it on when you go to the cutcherry; it would look very nice on your *chapkan*. The sahib would be very pleased to see you wearing this. Alas, dear brother-in-law. You are now in heaven and I lie in hell, suffering unspeakable agonies." Again, in spite of herself a few drops of tears fell from her eyes. She put that necklace by, scribbled a few things on a piece of paper and sent the necklace along with the letter to Sadhu Sahu, the moneylender.

Sadhu Sahu was a well-known moneylender in Naripur. He loaned out ready cash as well as grain. People in forty or fifty villages around took loans from him. It was said he could easily lend out a hundred thousand rupees even at midnight. He had granaries in ten villages. For him, to loan out a thousand *bharana*s of rice at a moment's notice was no big deal. Everyone said that no moneylender charged as low an interest rate as Sadhu Sahu did. If a poor debtor threw himself at Sahu's feet pleading his inability to pay the interest on a loan, the interest got waived. Whenever someone wanted to take a loan in cash or grain all he had to do was to write a handnote on a piece of palm leaf. No human witness was needed during such transactions; gods such as the sun, the moon and ten *digapal*s were invoked as witnesses. No one returned from Sahu's door empty-handed. Sahu always talked nicely to his debtors; no one ever heard him say a harsh word to them. His coolies and collection agents were forbidden to ill-treat any debtor. Sadhu Sahu had thousands of debtors, but no one could say that he had ever taken even one of them to the law court. At the same time, we have not heard of any debtor who had failed to repay the loan he had taken from him. There were two reasons for this: first, people were convinced that their family would be wiped out if they failed to return the loan they had taken from Sadhu Sahu. All the members of the family of one Rama Panda in village Gopalpur died of cholera because he had played

Sadhu Sahu false after having borrowed twenty rupees from him for holding his grandson's thread ceremony. This had taken place a long time ago, but people who had seen this happen were still around. The second reason: the old zamindar was a spendthrift. He was always in need of cash. Sahu advanced him money whenever he sent him a word. For this reason, the zemindar was very fond of him; he took personal interest in finding out who repaid loans taken from the moneylender and who did not. He got the loans collected from defaulters. Everyone therefore was a little scared of Sahu.

An open space lay in front of Sahu's residence. Sahu ran his office in a high-roofed house, which looked like a *chowpadhy*. Ten to twelve record-keepers sat in front of heaps of palm leaf bundles on the earth or on torn pieces of sacking and wrote away from morning till evening with the help of styluses. Sahu himself would sit a short distance away, leaning against a parapet and chanting 'Krishna, Krishna.' He was a tallish person slightly dark in complexion. He had a round face and was straight-nosed. His large eyes were slightly reddish. A well-oiled pigtail hung from the back of his head. A prominent Adam's apple stuck out of his longish neck. His arms were slightly long, and muscular. Hair grew all over his chest and his ears. He was always dressed in a nine-cubit long handspun *dhoti* and a six-cubit long shabby and oil-stained cotton towel. The *dhoti* he would send to the washerwoman once in every two or three months when it got very dirty; but the towel would never be washed for it was a sacred piece of cloth and would get defiled if the washerwoman touched it.

The moneylender had two sons. The eldest, Gobinda, was twenty. He had got married five years ago. His wife was fifteen years old and was now able to take care of the house. The younger son was aged twelve. He studied at the village school. There was talk of getting him married the next year in the month of May. Gobinda had studied up to the middle school level at the village school. But, in Sahu's opinion, he was utterly stupid and was absolutely not interested in doing anything useful. He kept a lot of pigeons and had many *gobara* birds in a cage. He wore a ten-cubit long fine-spun *dhoti*, a shirt and rubbed perfumed oil on his hair and put on shoes. All this was not at all to Sahu's liking and he was very cross with Gobinda, but he dared

not tell him off for fear of displeasing his wife. If he ever uttered one hard word to his son, she would roar like a tigress. After one of her sons died, she never let her husband say one harsh word to any of her surviving sons. She would also let them do whatever they liked and would never tell them off.

Sahu's wife, Srimati, was a tallish and fair-complexioned woman. Her eyes and her nose were so finely moulded that she looked like a goddess. Everyone in the village called her mother. She, too, looked upon them as her own children. If someone in the village fell ill, she would visit him six times in a day. She would also make sure that no one in the village ever went without food. She came to the help of the not so well to do in the village when they had to solemnize a marriage or on similar occasions. No guest was ever turned away from Sahu's doorstep. In his house there would always be a sackful of flattened rice, a pot of molasses, and a pot of soaked rice, for one never knew when someone hungry or thirsty would turn up at his doorstep. In fact many such people did. People in the village said that Sahu's wife was like Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, for, since the day she had set foot in the village, no one had suffered any want. Sahu's prosperity was a reward for his wife's piety. Sahu's wife wore a sixteen-cubit long cotton hand-woven saree. On both her hands, from her wrist to her elbows, she wore brass bangles weighing four seers. She put on two silver rings on her fingers, and two gold necklaces adorned her neck. Two heavy earrings made of beaten gold hung from her ears and had pulled the lobes down.

At the time of his marriage Gobinda had insisted that he must give his bride silver bangles and gold necklaces made in Cuttack, or else he would not marry at all. His parents and people in the village tried to dissuade him saying that this went against the ancestral customs of his caste. Word of this reached the old zamindar. The list of ornaments to be given to the bride was immediately called for and the zamindar ordered that ornaments worth a thousand rupees would be brought from Cuttack. Who would dare disobey the zamindar's orders? Srimati went to the zamindar's palace and tearfully begged him to change his mind. The zamindar said that feeding one hundred and eight brahmins at the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore could easily solve the problem. People from Sahu's own caste were placated only

after they were given two feasts. All the ornaments were made in Cuttack on the orders of the zamindar himself. Sahu's daughter-in-law was a very good-looking girl. According to Srimati, she was also very good-natured, for she did whatever her mother-in-law asked her to do.

Few couples in ordinary uneducated families were as devoted to each other as Sahu and his wife. Srimati made a point of doing everything for her husband— from giving him a water-filled tumbler in the morning to rinse his mouth to washing his clothes after he took his bath— herself. There were many servants and maidservants in the house, but she would not let them do anything for him. She ate only the food her husband left in his plate after having lunch or dinner. She would rub her husband's legs with oil from evening till midnight. All the same, the two would quarrel every day. Sahu was in the habit of uttering 'Krishna, Krishna, Krishna', his eyes closed. He would go on doing this unmindful of the fact that it was already midday and that the record keepers had gone home after tying up the palm leaf bundles. He would continue chanting the name of the Lord even after his servant Gurubaria would call him twice. In the end, his wife would come out screaming, 'You dried-up miser. You yourself don't eat and starve everyone else at home to death.' This outburst would bring Sahu back to his senses. He would say angrily, 'Oh Krishna, Krishna.' Then he would say in a low voice, 'Gobinda's mother is a quarrelsome woman. She quarrels with me every day.'

It was afternoon. Sahu was chanting the name of Lord, sitting on the veranda of his office. The record-keepers were busy at work. Ten to fifteen debtors sat surrounding them. The *padhiary* of the palace, Madan Mahakud, who was bent with age, arrived there supporting himself with a walking stick. He handed to Sahu a golden necklace and a letter saying that Dahima had sent these to him. On being told that the letter had come from Dhaima, Sahu hurriedly rose to his feet, and touched the letter and the necklace thrice to his forehead. He was unlettered, so a record-keeper read out the letter to him, which said, 'Lend us three hundred rupees and thirty *bharana*s of rice, keeping the necklace as a surety. The loan will be repaid with interest in the month of Makara after the taxes are collected from the villages granted to her.' Deeply moved, Sahu said, ' Krishna

Krishna. Please tell Dhaima I salute her a million times. Take three hundred rupees and the necklace. I'll send the rice later when the *dandidar* comes. Does Dhaima think I am such an ungrateful wretch that I would lend her money keeping the necklace as surety and charge her interest? Whose property is all this? Come whenever you need money and take it from me. Our young zamindar, our provider, is but a child. What is the use of my property if it can't be of use to him when he has fallen on bad days?'

Chapter Thirty-six

Tikayat Baboo Passes His Middle School Examination

The minor school, which Samant Udit Malla Uttararay had set up in his zamindari, kept going only on account of his son, Tikayat baboo. To follow his example and to help him forget his sorrow, some villagers sent their children to school. The palace used to give the teacher his salary and meet other expenses of the school. But, after the death of Uttararay, such financial support was discontinued. Part of the expenditure was met from the income from taxes collected from villages granted to Chandamani and the other part was met from fees paid by the students. Two months ago, Tikayat Baboo had sat for the middle school examination. A letter saying that he had been placed in the first division came to the teacher. The letter also said that he would get a scholarship amounting to four rupees a month and study in a school in Cuttack. The letter caused a great deal of excitement in the village. Some people understood what the matter was and felt happy; many others who did not know what had happened rejoiced just the same. For the first time, after five long years, the palace bore signs of happiness. The servants' quarter resounded with the sound of conch-shells being blown and women ululating. Tears streamed from Dhaima's eyes; it seemed as if a cloud of steam arose from burning cinders when one poured water on them. True, Chandamani had got better; but she was yet to take interest in the affairs of the zamindari, and she was not in a position to decide what was good for her. When she heard that Naru had passed his examination, she sat quietly for a while. Two drops of tear trembled in the corners of her eyes. No one had seen such an expression on her face ever before.

A great danger now presented itself in the midst of all this

rejoicing. Naru Baboo was adamant that he would go to Cuttack to receive an English education. It seemed as if a thunderbolt struck the palace. Dhaima wept bitterly and was incoherent with grief. She held her grandson tight and pleaded, 'Why should you go to Cuttack? If you want to read English, you can do so here in this palace. I will give whatever money it will take. I will get good teachers from Cuttack. Please don't go to Cuttack'. But Naru would not listen. He must go to Cuttack. Record-keepers and the *padhiary* tried to convince him. The maidservant in charge of pantry and many others tried to dissuade him. But he was stubborn: he must go to Cuttack. Chandamani said, on her own, 'Dhaima, let him go to Cuttack, if he wants to. He belongs to a family where everyone must have their way, come what may. This was how...' She wanted to say something but the words got stuck in her throat. Dhaima sensed it and quickly left the place.

The palace astrologer, Ganeswar Khadiratna came and fixed the day for Naru's departure. He said that a westward journey undertaken early in the morning on the Wednesday of the bright fortnight of the month of Mesha would prove auspicious for someone born under the Taurus sign. Two brahmins were engaged to chant the name of Lord Bishnu a thousand times at the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore and to offer a hundred thousand *tulsi* leaves to the deity. Dhaima touched an areca nut on Naru's forehead and handed it to the brahmin. Arrangements were made to feed one hundred and eight brahmins at the palace daily.

Dhaima sent for the old *chhamukaran*. The two deliberated over where Naru would stay in Cuttack. The record-keeper said, 'There are two places where he can stay. But his maternal uncle's house is a very busy and noisy place. He would not find it convenient to stay there.'(The record-keeper could not bring himself to say what he really felt, but he was against Naru staying at his maternal uncle's house.) Dhaima, however, understood what he meant and said, 'I fully agree with you. But I see a few problems with the alternative: If Naru goes to stay at his mother's sister's place, Nata will refuse to pay his expenses. And Chandamani's brother-in-law will never accept any money for letting Naru stay in his house. He is a kinsman, after all. The idea of putting Naru up at his place without giving him any

money is not acceptable to me. There is another thing: Nata, being what he is, will deliberately create mischief, if Naru stays anywhere else. It will also not look nice if Naru does not stay with him. We should act in such a way that we do not lose our face. Karuna Barik will accompany Naru. He is clever as well as trustworthy. Moreover, Naru is dearer to him than even his own life. If he feels there is any problem, how long will it take for us to shift Naru to his mother's sister's place?'

The old record-keeper said no more and kept quiet.

Chapter Thirty-seven
Naru baboo's Departure for Cuttack

Four bearers carried the palanquin on their shoulders. One *paik* walked in front of the palanquin and another behind. Four servants accompanied them carrying loads of gifts. A brass oil container and a torch in his left hand and a bamboo staff in his right, and a small bundle on his back, Karuna Barik strode along. He had taken care to fill the torch with oil in case it would get dark on the way. At dusk, the palanquin arrived at the *nazar*'s residence in Bakharabad in Cuttack. The bearers set the palanquin down with a thud, and fanned themselves with the cotton towels they had wound round their waists. The *nazar* was coming out of the house at this time, a prayer bag in hand. In the morning and in the evening the Nazar would be never seen without this bag. Some wicked fellows said that it was all a trick to impress people. The *nazar* slid the palanquin door open and ushered Naru babu into the house. Karuna Barik took out the mattress from the palanquin and spread it in front of the *nazar*'s room. The *nazar* made Naru baboo sit there and went into the inner wing. Here, in the courtyard, his wife sat on a small cloth mat, leaning against a large pillow and was busy giving instructions to the brahmin cook on what was to be cooked for dinner. On seeing her husband she rearranged her clothes and said, looking up, 'Why all this fuss? For this reason I never offer a seat to anyone who comes from the village. They bring all kinds of trouble.'

The *nazar* said, "Quiet. Don't say anything. Something good has happened. This is good news. All kinds of sweetmeats and good things will be sent from the palace. How much of those could a mere boy eat? Again, we will spend ten rupees for him

and write in the account book that we have spent twentyfive.' His wife protested, 'No, no. You are mistaken. One has to spend a lot of money on children. At least a hundred rupees a month. Not a paise less. You will find out later.'

The *nazar* said, 'Don't worry. I'll enter a larger amount in the account book.' The couple looked at each other and exchanged smiles.

The *nazar* called Naru baboo in and took him to meet his aunt. Naru baboo paid his respects to her by touching his forehead on the ground. His aunt stood staring vacantly at his face. It was difficult to say if she found nothing to say or she was unable to say anything. His aunt's behaviour left Naru baboo puzzled. He merely stood, hanging his head. The *nazar* quickly led him away and took him into the sitting room. On one side of the sitting room lay an oblong dark and narrow room. It was built in an old-fashioned manner. The doorway was low; a tall person would find it difficult to enter the room without stooping. On the northern wall was set a very small window beyond the reach of one's hand. One lost one's honour if someone from outside peered into one's room from outside. So, in olden days, clever people set their windows high on the wall. The room got dark during the day when one closed the door and the window; the air was completely shut out. All Naru baboo's things were kept here. An old, wobbly four-poster lay in the room. Naru baboo was to sleep on this. Karuna swept the floor with a broomstick and made the bed on the four-poster. He pulled a long face. The room, it seemed, was not at all to his taste.

It was almost midnight. Everyone in the *nazar*'s house had gone to bed after dinner. The *paik*s and the palanquin bearers were very tired after having toiled all day long. All they had eaten during the day was a few handfuls of flattened rice. They had gone to sleep, lying on the floor on the end border of their *dhoti*s. No one in the *nazar*'s house found any time to spare a thought for them. They now woke up, feeling terribly hungry. But whom could they call – and who would listen to them? They were rustics from the *mofussil*, after all, and they were now in the house of a big officer. So they would not dare make any noise. Dhaima had put

quite a few rupees and loose change in a pouch and had kept it in a rattan chest and instructed Karuna that he would spend the money whenever an emergency arose without waiting for Naru baboo's permission. Karuna had the key to its lock. He now took out two rupees and gave these to the *paik*s. The bazaar was still open. They bought quantities of flattened rice and molasses, ate to their heart's content and went back to sleep. They all got up while it was still dark and set off for their village. When day broke, they were all gone.

Chapter Thirty-eight
Menaka Dei's House Rent

While in Cuttack, Menaka Dei used to get one rupee and eight annas every month for four years and in this way had saved a little money. One day, she came to know that a four-roomed house in Dargha Bazaar, which lay close to their rented house in Cuttack, was going to be auctioned off on the orders of the court. She and her sister consulted each other and decided that, since money usually slipped through one's fingers, buying a house in Cuttack, which might come to the children's help some day, would be a wise thing to do. As Dasarathi Das was a government servant, he could not buy landed property in his own name. So Menaka Dei bought the property at the auction. This decision brought her great benefit now. She was getting on in years and suffered from all kinds of ailments. Nowadays, she found even moving about difficult, let alone do household chores. She felt a little better after she took opium worth two pice in the evening every day. Opium-addicts usually hanker after something sweet after they swallow opium; they must put at least a *paan* into their mouth. The four rupees she got as house rent helped her meet all her expenses. She, therefore, never had to ask her elder son, Banambar, for any money. But, Banambar, for his part, never forgot to find out if his mother needed any money for buying opium. Menaka Dei knew that Banambar, who managed the landed property, had little ready cash. So she thought it would not be right to expect him to give her any money. In any case, there was no need to do so. She did not have to worry about her food or her clothes. Banambar adored his mother. After his day's work was done, he would spend some time by his mother's side in the evening and

find out if she was comfortable. Whenever the old woman fell ill, his wife would sit by her, massage her legs and asked her if she needed anything. One day, Menaka Dei learnt that Natabar baboo had taken her house in Cuttack into his possession so that tenants from Naripur could stay there whenever court cases brought them to town. From then on, the old woman no longer received any house rent.

Chapter Thirty-nine
Shama Samal and Haribol Barik

It was a little past midday, time for people in the village to have a meal. There was no one at the bathing *ghat* of Chandan pond except Haribol Barik, who stood neck-deep in water, and rubbed his body hard with a torn oil-stained towel. This was usually the time when he took his daily bath, for the whole morning he would spend going round the village. So his bath usually got delayed.

Shama Samal, a coarse cotton towel wound tightly around his loin, his head shaded by a palm leaf hat, and his body dripping with mud, came to the *ghat* from his field, a stick in hand and clucking his tongue. There he unyoked his bullocks and sent them to graze on one side of the pond. He held a *gaba* twig in his teeth, with which he brushed his teeth and hurriedly stepped into the water. Barik said, 'What is this, Samal? I see that you are coming from your field. We are already half way through the month of Karkat. Everybody's ploughshed now hangs from his eaves. How come you have still work to do in your field? What kind of farmer are you? How many *batis* of land do you own, tell me?'

Samal said, 'What you had warned me against has actually come to pass. I bought a bullock for I got it cheap. But going for something cheap has landed me in deep trouble. It made life so miserable I could not rest until I sold it off. I thought I would make do with them somehow this year, but that wretched animal did not let me do even that; it would lie down the moment the yoke was placed on its shoulder.'

Barik said, 'Haribol, This is why people call a panchayat when they sell or buy cattle. But you thought yourself very clever and did not feel the need for consulting your elders. Now reap what you

sowed. Do you know this saying on what you should keep in mind while buying bullocks? It goes like this:

The bullock with thin horns is a strong animal
Buy one with tapering horns and curse your luck
If you are offered an ox with a flat head and thick tail
Don't take it even if it is given for free.
The hind parts of a cow and the head of an ox:
Look carefully at these before buying cattle.

Do you get the drift? A cow with large hind parts gives more milk and an ox with impressive fore parts turns out to be strong.'

Samal said, 'Now I realize my mistake: the wretched bullock I had bought had tapering horns. It was as lazy as it was unwilling to work. Look at that reddish brown bullock, which I yoke to the left side of the yoke. That's a real bullock. When you plough your field, all you have to do is to keep your hand firmly on the handle of the plough. Just touch its tail and it moves with the speed of lightning.' Barik asked, 'Haribol. How much did you pay for it, my son?"

Samal— The fat one and the mottled one cost me ten rupees. I had no cash at all at the time. So I had to sell off sixty *nouti*s of rice. All the rice I had at home was gone. We bought the bullocks all right, but now we had nothing to eat. I borrowed forty *nouti*s of rice from Sahu's granary in Nuagaon. Just now you blamed me for the delay in weeding my field. Now you see what led to the delay.

Barik— Haribol. Why did you go to that far-off place for a loan? If you had gone to Thakurgaon and talked to the zamindar's record-keeper, he would have loaned out rice to you promptly.

Samal—You talk as if you know nothing at all. Were you away from the village? Times have changed utterly. Where is the rice that we could borrow? Gone are the days when granaries as big as elephant stables were filled to the brim with rice. The zamindar had left clear and strict instruction that, if ever a tenant went there to ask for help, he would never be allowed to return empty-handed. Now go and see for yourself— the granaries have been swept clean, these storehouses blessed by goddess Lakshmi lie absolutely empty. And do you know how all this is explained? The record-keepers that have been serving the zamindar's family for generations are called thieves and the

tenants are called untrustworthy people who do not repay loans advanced to them. After all he is our young master's uncle. He gave orders, "My nephews are but mere boys. So the money that belongs to them must be kept carefully. Trusted record-keepers have come from Cuttack; old record-keepers must leave everything to them." The rice was sold off, the money was put into a cloth bag and was taken to Cuttack. Even newly harvested paddy would not be brought to the granary; it would be sold at the threshing floor itself and the money would be taken to Cuttack.

We tenants are but crows and we caw all the time
There is one that loots everything
You who make so much noise
Tell me what are you doing?

Barik let out a sigh and said, 'Haribol. Shama, my son. You have become a poet. But the things you say mocking at me are true. One person goes on looting us and all we merely keep gaping at him. You have opened my eyes. I swear by the Sun God shining overhead that I will set to work from today.

Samal— We are like a leech with salt thrown into its mouth. There is no life in our bodies. Lakhs of oppressed tenants let out sighs, which have deafened even gods. We do not dare open our mouths. The servants in the palace are starving; who has time to bother about people like us? On the first day of the month of Kartik tenants pay an instalment of revenue owing to them at the temple of Lord Jugal Narayan. Four fifths of the amount thus collected used to go to the temple treasury. But, since the day the zamindar died, the Lord has not received even a single coin, has He? Why should anyone care for gods any more?

Shama Samal went on talking, forgetting all about himself. As for Haribol Barik, if he fell into talk he would think nothing of going on and on even while standing neck-deep in water. Shama now felt stabs of hunger. He looked for ways of escape. At last he found a way out. He shouted 'Hey you wretched bullocks. You are straying. I'll gift you two to a brahmin today.' Saying this he ran home, stick in hand, and dripping, straight to where rice was served, sparing no thought for the wretched bullocks.

Chapter Forty

Mr Jones, the Joint Magistrate

Many, who have made a trip to England, tell us that the educated members of the English aristocracy are godlike beings. We, too, for our part, have come across many such godlike civilians. One gets to hear about their famous deeds everywhere. However, there are good and bad civilians. Think of a young man from a cold country who passes a difficult examination, cherishes dreams of getting ahead in life, crosses a vast ocean and finally disembarks from a ship. The hot dry air of India burns his body and the prospect of exercising a lot of power excites his mind. Living in his bungalow all the time in the company of cooks and servants belonging to the lower orders of society and having to depend on them for procuring the necessaries of daily life, he gets deceived by them again and again. The behaviour of these cooks and servants casts the malleable mind of the sahib into a mould and gives it a certain shape. This shape determines for a long time the way the sahib looks at the general character of Indian people. A lack of sympathy marks the treatment the sahib metes out to the natives during this time. He also deems it proper to be harsh to the natives in his dealings with them. In the opinion of his subordinates, our joint magistrate Mr Jones was a sahib of this type. W. Jones was the magistrate of Cuttack district. He was about thirty, and was unmarried. His short temper struck fear into his clerks and *chaprassis*. It was a hot day in the month of May. The sahib was at his cutcherry. The crowded courtroom made him feel hotter. He said, 'Pull the fan harder.' Chaprassi Khoda Bux rushed to carry out the order. He rudely pushed Ganga Behera aside and sat down to teach him the job of fan pulling. He pulled it hard twice and the rope gave way. The sahib got very angry, and turning to look at the *peshkar*, he demanded, 'Why did the rope snap?' The *peshkar* promptly explained, saying, 'Huzoor, the rope is an old one.' The sahib said, 'Nonsense.

This I can very well see. Tell me why an old rope has been used?'

The peshkar— Huzoor, supplying a new rope is the job of the *nazar*. The old rope is replaced with a new one once every month. This has already been done in all other office rooms. A new rope will be fixed here, too.

The sahib— Send for that *nazar*, the rascal.

The *chaprassi* ran out to summon the *nazar*. He came back and informed the sahib that the *nazar* was at the office of the collector. In the mean time, Khuda Bux had fixed the fan rope by tying a few knots. The sahib's displeasure with the *nazar* now made the *peshkar* a little nervous. True, he and the *nazar* were not on the best of terms, but they were from the same caste and were colleagues, after all. He, therefore, thought he should not have taken the *nazar*'s name before the sahib. Of course, he did not do so out of jealousy. The sahib's fury threw him into utter confusion and made him come out with the truth.

Khuda Bux's brother, Rahim Bux was the storekeeper of the cutcherry. He nursed grudges against the *nazar* for a number of reasons. He felt very happy when he learnt from his brother of what had happened at the cutcherry that day. The next day he arrived there half an hour before it opened and repaired the fan rope with a penknife. The sahib came to the cutcherry. The fan was pulled once or twice and the rope snapped once more. The *chaprassi* again ran out to bring the *nazar* before the sahib. But the *nazar* was not present in the cutcherry. Every morning he went to the bungalow of the collector. He, therefore, came to the cutcherry a little late every day. Why should the sahib take the trouble to find out about the matter? He attributed all this to the *nazar*'s insolence. He took out a one rupee coin from his box, flung it at the *peshkar* and said, 'Go and get another piece of rope.' Khuda Bux knew everything about what happened to ropes at the cutcherry. Ropes bought with government money lay in the cutcherry store. May be a new rope would have replaced the old one at the cutcherry today. Khuda Bux ran out and got a rope in five minutes. When the sahib looked at him he bowed very low and salaamed him. His cleverness and the *nazar*'s negligence were made known to the sahib at once. But the clerks understood what all this really meant.

Chapter Forty-one
The Mother-in-law Arrives

It was a Sunday and the cutcherry was closed. But so what? The *nazar* had no respite from office work throughout the week. The sahib had gone on a tour of the *moffussil* areas; so the mail had to be forwarded to him. Eight almirahs were needed in the record room. Four carpenters had come to bid for the job. The government fixed the price of almirahs. However, it took three long hours of haggling to decide the amount the nazar was to receive as his commission. At last Madan Maharana from Buxi Buzar, who agreed to pay him commission at the rate of four *anna*s a rupee, received the advance and left after giving a receipt. As usual, it got dark by the time the nazar came home after getting all this work out of the way. He now sat on a low stool in the inner courtyard after taking refreshments. Seated on the floor beside him, his wife was busy preparing *paan*. Chitrakala prepared the *hookah*, blew hard into the chillum and handed it to the nazar. The ten rupees he had earned at the cutcherry from the carpenters, his wife had not put away in the almirah yet; the coins lay in a stack in front of her. The sight of the money filled the heart of the couple with great pleasure. Chitrakala kept replacing the chillum on the hookah. A short while later, the *nazar* asked for his prayer bag, indicating that it was time for him to go out. The prayer bag hung from a nail driven into a wall. The nazar carried it whenever he went out in the evening. His wife said, 'Now you are off to the temple. We managed somehow during the day. Tell me, what will we cook for dinner tonight? We can't carry on as we used to do earlier. Our nephew and his servant are now staying with us. Looking after them is no easy task.'

The *nazar* said, 'That is true. All right. I'll get an orderly to look for a brahmin cook, or my orderly, Ram Pandey, will do the cooking tonight. We'll do something about arrangements for tomorrow.'

The *nazar*'s wife said, 'Let me tell you. I can't handle these brahmins any more. They eat three full meals a day and on top of that they steal. And as soon as the month ends, they ask for their salary. You delay giving them their salary by ten or fifteen days and they run away. Haven't you noticed that no cook lasts for more than two months here? I, for my part, make a point of not giving them their salary.'

Chitra added, 'You are right. What you say is absolutely true. The brahmins do eat a great deal of food. They would swallow two seers of rice in the course of one meal. The brahmin cooks I have come across in Cuttack are all thieves. They are no better than dacoits and they kill people. Whenever they ask for their salary my mistress drives them away. And a very good thing she does, I must say. She knows them inside out and knows how to deal with them. You brahmins, tell me, don't you get fed here? Why do you then ask for a salary? No, no never ever give them any salary.'

The *nazar*'s wife— Say whatever you like. The brahmins are too much for me. They have given me a lot of trouble.

Chitra— Oh Lord Ram. How miserable these brahmins make our mistress's life. She breaks down and weeps when she can't bear the trouble they give her. Seeing her cry breaks my heart. I go home and cry for hours.

The *nazar*'s wife— How about bringing my mother over? I think it will be a good idea.

Chitra—That is a very good idea. I have been meaning to suggest this for the last eight days. But I forgot to do so.

The *nazar*'s wife— My mother and I will do the cooking together. It will be very convenient. And consider how little we have to spend on her. Mother will have to be only fed and clothed. We will not have to give her a salary.

Chitra— How much will an old woman like her eat after all? She can survive for four days on a handful of rice and make do with

one saree for four or five years. Lots of money will be saved every month for she won't take any salary.

The *nazar*'s wife— Mother will lovingly prepare many dishes.. She will make sure that nothing is wasted. All that servants do is to boil a few things anyhow and pocket their salary.

Chitra— Is there any brahmin in Cuttack who is mother's equal as a cook? Who can serve out food as expertly as she can? She has cooked all her life. How can any one match her?

The *nazar* sat listening to all this. He thought to himself, 'Let her come, then. One day I am told that she has nothing in the house to eat; on another, that she wants clothes; on yet another that the zamindar's peon is sitting at her doorstep demanding that she pays the land revenues. All these problems I have to sort out. My wife also sends her a few things on the sly. All right, let her come. I would then not have to run two establishments but I don't want that Raghaba to come with her. He looks like a demon and will consume two seers of rice a day. Why should I unnecessarily spend so much money on his account?' He said to his wife, 'All right. Let her come. There is no need for Raghab to come with her, is there?'

Chitra— Of course. Mother must come over. And brother Raghab need not accompany her. Who will look after everything there? If he comes here, thieves will steal everything. Monkeys will jump on the roof and make it cave in. Who will drive them away?
The *nazar*'s wife— No, no. How can the child live on his own when my mother comes here? Who will cook for him?

Chitra— You are absolutely right. How could brother Raghab stay all alone? He is but a child. He will feel scared if he is left alone. Let's forget all other problems. Tell me, who will cook him a little rice?

This set the *nazar* thinking, 'No, I have now no option but to bring him over here. But he must not be allowed to eat without doing any work. I'll give him something to do.' He said to his wife, 'All right. Let them come.'

Chitra— Master. Send someone to them immediately. Runners should leave tonight.

The *nazar* gave a smile and said nothing. It was decided that someone would go and bring them over next Wednesday.

Chapter Forty-two
The Mother and Son Arrive

Four days after the decision to bring the nazar's mother-in-law to Cuttack was taken, a covered bullock cart arrived in front of the nazar's residence at Bakharabad. A piece of cloth hung like a curtain at the entrance of the matted palm leaf hood of the cart. One of the *nazar*'s orderlies, who was walking before it, said, 'Unyoke the bullocks here.' The carter did so and tethered the bullocks to the rear part of the cart. He placed the front part of the cart on the threshold of the *nazar*'s residence and went back to his bullocks. The orderly and others who were present there moved aside. Chitra came out, a lamp in hand, followed by the *nazar*'s wife, who pulled the curtain aside and led an old woman out of the cart saying, 'Come inside mother dear.' Chitra walked ahead of them, carrying the lamp. They all made their way into the house along the verandah. A short distance away, close beside the cart stood a tall young man, who had blended into the dark. He had put on a *dhoti* that reached just below his knees, wound a shabby towel around his head and carried a bamboo staff. After the womenfolk entered into the house he went slowly to the cart, groped about in the dark and took out a basket. The basket was crammed with all kinds of odds and ends. He now walked into the house, carrying the basket on his left shoulder and the bamboo staff in his right hand. The way to the inner courtyard lay along a number of verandahs. But this the young man did not know, for he was new to the place. It was pitch dark in the outer courtyard. Chitra, who carried the lamp, had already gone in. The young man stepped over the threshold and kept walking straight ahead. He was feeling very excited. This was his elder sister's residence. Oh, what a big pucca house! And he was going to live here! He did not look down. He

walked on, his gaze fixed on the pucca house. A verandah ran around the courtyard, which lay a cubit below. The young man took one step forward and crashed heavily, like a felled palm tree. The things his basket contained fell out causing a racket and lay scattered all over the courtyard. The poor man went through an unspeakable agony. He quickly rose to his feet and massaged his thighs and his knees. After all, he was in the house of a relative, who was a big officer. Moreover, he was a complete stranger to the place. He kept himself from crying out in pain more out of fear than embarrassment. What a pity! How miserable man's life is. It seemed as if he is constantly plagued by sorrows. What pleasures was he looking forward to a moment ago and now in the twinkling of an eye things changed and he was once more face to face with terrible grief. It is as if sorrows chase man all the time, and pounce upon him whenever they find an opportunity, like a tiger springing on his prey. People who believe in *karma* might say, 'Why did not this man walk along the verandah? What happened to him was but the fruit of his action.' However, we believe that an invisible hand is always at work behind man's actions and shapes his destiny. In other words, it is called fate or providence. Human beings are unable to see it. Let us elaborate on this. King Nala or King Yudhistir knowingly took part in a game of dice and got banished to the forest when they got defeated. But Sri Ramachandra, for his part, had not committed any mistake. Why did he have to go to the forest? Now, this should make you realise that many sorrows are visited on human beings by an invisible providence, the causes of which lie beyond the pale of human understanding and that they are utterly powerless to mitigate them.

Chitrakala, who was in the inner wing of the house at the time, heard the jangling noise made by things falling on the floor. She rushed back, lamp in hand, crying, 'Oh. Our dear brother had had a fall.'

She came and saw the floor strewn with odds and ends and a man, looking like a black termite mound, running his hand over his knees. It took no time for clever Chitrakala to take everything in. She smiled to herself and thought, 'Is this fellow blind or what?' But she said aloud, her voice full of anxious concern, 'Alas. Alas. Oh dear brother. How did you have a fall? I was bringing the lamp. Why

did you not wait?' She took his hand and helped him to rise to his feet.

Shame, grief and bodily pain had made the young man sweat so profusely that he was wet through. Chitrakala felt repelled by his clammy hands and quickly withdrew her hand from his and set about picking up things from the courtyard. The wicked woman made a mental note of everything she found. This is a bundle of clothes. There are only two pieces in it. This is a packet of rice. She lifted it and guessed it weighed about two seers. She came across a small packet. She felt it with her fingers but could not figure out if it contained green or black gram. Oh, this very small packet carries about two handfuls of mustard seeds. Chitrakala laughed heartily to herself and thought, 'They have come carrying all their household effects, and have made sure nothing has been left behind.' A tumbler had rolled away, and lay a short distance away. Chitra picked it up and found that a stick of camphor had been stuck in a hole in it. Chitra understood what the matter was. The tumbler had got dented when it fell on the hard pucca floor of the courtyard. What on earth is this? This must be a rice bowl. It seemed light like a leaf. Can a bell metal utensil be so light, so thin? Oh God. It had cracked when it hit the floor.

Oh you Chitrakala. Do keep quiet. The young man was in acute bodily pain. What would happen to him if you tell him that he had lost all his worldly goods? Chitrakala put everything into a bamboo basket and walked ahead of him, lamp in hand. The young man followed her. His mother and his sister were too busy crying to find out about what had happened in the outer courtyard. The *nazar*'s wife stood like a pillar in the middle of the inner courtyard and let out loud wails. Feelings of joy fill the heart to overflowing when two persons meet after a long separation. Maybe, the joy of being united falls like water on the fire of the pain of separation. The resulting steam finds an outlet through the eyes in the form of tears. The mother of the *nazar*'s wife held her daughter in her arms and cried, 'O my dear Bishki. I had gone blind for I had not seen your moon-like face for so long. O my black gem. O the light of my life. O the darling of my grieving heart.' She employed a number of such epithets and went on wailing for a long while. We need not describe

all this in detail, for we want to leave this to the reader's imagination. However, we made a new discovery after so many days: Was the *nazar*'s wife's name Bishki? Enquiries revealed that her real name was Bishakha. We have been annoying our readers by calling her the *nazar*'s wife for so long. We did not know her real name. What else could we have done? Can one find out the name of the mistress of so important a family by talking to men in the street? Her mother's arrival was therefore a piece of good luck for this author.

A water-filled tumbler in hand, Chitrakla stood waiting to wash the feet of her mistress's mother. But the mother and her daughter went on wailing. This vexed Chitrakala to no end. She wondered if these two women would spend the whole night weeping. She said, Please come, mother. Your delicate body must be aching after the day-long ride in the bullock cart. Come and wash your feet.' Then she took her by the hand, led her to the mouth of the drain and poured water on her feet. She turned up her nose when she wiped the rough, lumpy sole of her feet. After the mother, it was her son's turn to get his feet washed. Chitra ran her hand over his feet once and pulled a long face. She drew her hand away and poured water on his feet, which were abnormally large. Veins, thick like strings, stood on them. The toes were ugly. The nails, shaped like the blade of a scythe, had not been pared for ages. One could put a finger into the cracks on his heel.

After getting their feet washed, the old woman, her daughter and her son sat down to take refreshments. Chitra waited upon them and served out the dishes. The old woman asked, 'Bishki, my dear. Who is this girl?' Bishakha Dei said, 'She is my maidservant.' This made Chitra furious. She thought to herself, 'Had anyone among fourteen generations of your ancestors ever employed a maidservant?' But she dared not protest. To be able to feed oneself, one must be willing to endure blows on one's back. She therefore kept quiet. The old woman fixed her gaze on Chitra for quite a while and thought to herself. 'My daughter's maidservant is so beautiful? And she wears so many ornaments? Amazing. My daughter has really become a queen.'

Chapter Forty-three
Naru baboo's Problems Begin

Since the day Naru Baboo arrived in Cuttack, life has been full of all kinds of inconveniences, the chief of which had to do with food. He had an extremely painful experience the day he arrived at his uncle's place. Late at night, the brahmin cook led him into the inner wing of the house. A small mat had been laid out and a wick burnt feebly on a brass lamp-stand. No one waited there to lovingly ask him to sit down. Naru baboo kept gazing at the small mat and the lamp. His heart sank. Had someone looked hard at his face, he would have noticed that it had gone pale. The cook served out rice and curry and placed a little tumbler full of water beside him. Then, saying 'Please come and eat', he went away.

Naru baboo went and sat on the mat, like a machine. But it was an unfamiliar and unnatural experience for him. At home, rice, white like *malli* flower, used to be served with great care to him on a beautiful silver plate, on which was put a small silver bowl containing ghee. Various other dishes were served in eight to ten silver bowls. Two fine-featured women in white used to remain present while he ate. His naked two-year-old little brother used to mess up the food in the plate with his two hands, and Dhaima used to get him to eat by scolding him, threatening him or telling him stories. She would say, 'Naru, eat this. Eat that,' and hand him pieces of fried fish after taking out the bones. Naru baboo also missed the white *kabuli* cat that his father had brought for him from Cuttack, which used to mew while he had his meals at home. We took so long to describe all these, but these flashed across Naru's eyes in an instant and made him feel utterly miserable. He used to be a restless and obstinate child. However, after the passing of his father, something came over

him and he grew quiet and serious and was able to endure a great deal of inconvenience. He was now feeling very hungry for he had not eaten anything during the day. So he put a little food into his mouth anyhow. He thought he would drink the milk and finish his meal. The milk tasted strange. He held the bowl to the light. The liquid did look white like milk. However, he decided not to drink it. He said nothing, washed his hands and fell asleep as soon as he lay down on the bed.

Karuna was shocked when he went to pick up the plates and the bowls. He wondered how his young master would survive if this happened day after day. Dhaima had told him that he should meet Naru's mausa, Pitambar, who lived in Cuttack, every day, keep him informed of how Naru was doing, and act according to his advice. Next morning, after attending to Naru baboo, Karuna went straight to Pitambar and told him about what had happened. Pitamabar found a solution to the problem: There was a hotel in Balu Bazar, which was run by a brahmin. This was different from other hotels in Cuttack, as it had employed good cooks and servants. Good dishes were prepared here and it had among its patrons many persons of account in Cuttack. It was arranged that a cook of this hotel would go and deliver good dishes to Naru baboo every day. Dhaima had sent word to Natabar that, as Naru did not take rice at night, he should be served *puri* and curry instead. Naru Baboo went through a hard time during the first three four nights, for he found the *puri* and the little curry which came from his uncle's kitchen totally inedible. Later, Karuna helped himself to these.

The food sent from the hotel did nicely for Naru baboo. His uncle and his aunt remained completely in the dark about what he ate for dinner every day. They never interested themselves in Naru's affairs. How would they find out? The work at the cutcherry and going to the temple in the evening kept Natabar busy from morning till midnight. By the time he came back home from the temple, Naru baboo would be in bed after taking his dinner.

Accommodation for Naru baboo at his uncle's house was as bad as the food he was given there. When one closed the door of his room, it seemed night had descended. On Sundays and on some other weekdays, so much noise came from his uncle's office room that

Naru babu had to keep the doors of his room shut. On such occasions, Karuna would bolt the door from inside and light a lamp on Naru Babu's table to make it possible for him to study. Naru baboo heard from his fellow-students who had come from outside Cuttack that they all had to put up with many kinds of difficulties. He was ignorant of the ways of the world, after all. So he thought one had to put up with inconveniences if one studied in Cuttack. He now decided that he would endure every hardship and pursue his studies in Cuttack. The adored child of the Uttararay family, the apple of his grandmother's eyes, he was a complete stranger to hardships. Now he was being assailed by all the hardships in the world. But he was resolved that he would endure them all and read English. He had learnt how to cope with inconveniences. Adversity teaches someone how to become a real human being.

However, there is a limit to everything. Naru baboo's troubles had now become unbearable. The problem that he had to face at the moment was truly beyond anybody's endurance. Raghab Pattanaik was put up in his room. The *nazar*'s wife said, 'It is such a large room it could accommodate ten persons. How much space does a child like Naru need to sleep in? If there is any problem, let that barber sleep outside.'

The physical appearance and conduct of Raghab uncle struck terror into Naru Baboo's heart. It was as if he was terrifying like a tiger. Naru baboo was close to bursting into tears. In the end, the young master and his servant put their heads together and decided that they should wait and watch. But this brought no comfort to Naru baboo. He constantly looked for ways of escaping from Raghab uncle. For the first two, three days, Raghab lay quietly in one corner of the room. He only came to sleep in the room. The rest of the day he spent in the company of servants and messengers. He could not muster enough courage to approach Naru baboo. He thought to himself, 'He is a rich man's son. Who knows, he may say something rude to me.' A few days passed. If one stays near someone all the time he slowly overcomes his fear of that person. Again, his sister had said to him, 'Naru is your *bhanaja*. You call him *bhanaja* baboo.'

One morning, when Naru baboo, seated on a string cot, was going over his lessons, Raghab came in and sat very close to him, his

body almost touching Naru baboo's. The next day, he started turning the pages of books. One day, he opened a book and said, 'How funny. This looks like the picture of an ox.' Then he turned over two pages and remarked, 'Very very funny. This is a cat. This is a tree. The cover of this book is coloured, dear *bhanaja*. What book is this? Can I read it? Will you teach me how to read it one of these days?'

Karuna, who was sitting nearby, could see that his young master was annoyed for he was being disturbed. He could not stand it any more and said, 'Sir, please. Let the young master do his lessons now. Don't talk to him now. You could talk to him some other time and ask him about his books.'

Raghab was delighted to hear Karuna addressing him so respectfully. No one had ever called him 'Sir'. This was the first time in his life that someone had done so. In his village everyone called him Raghua Mohanty. 'My sister is a queen. I am a lord.' The thought pleased him immensely and made him laugh heartily.

Living with Raghab Mohanty in the same room became more and more difficult as days passed by. Naru baboo took refreshments after he came back from school every day. Raghab would keep staring at his food, for he was an utterly ignorant and poor rustic, and a complete stranger to refinement of any kind. Naru baboo would feel very awkward and get up before finishing his meal. This was not at all to Karuna's liking and he began to feel extremely vexed by all this. Now a days he sat in front of Naru Baboo, shielding him whenever he took refreshments. Luckily for him, at Naru baboo's dinnertime, Raghab Mahanty would be out taking a stroll in the bazaar in the company of servants. Karuna would bolt the door from inside and serve dinner to his young master before Raghab came back home. Raghab, for his part, remained completely in the dark about what went on in his absence.

Chapter Forty-four
Aren't You a Cowherd?

The day after he arrived in Cuttack, Raghab Mohanty stood at the door of his brother-in-law's house in the morning and watched people walking up and down the road. 'Oh. How many people live in Cuttack! There are so many baboos here. Is that a horse-drawn buggy?' he thought to himself. The sight of the horses yoked to the buggy amused him greatly and made him laugh. He had, of course, heard of buggies, but he thought that horses were yoked to a buggy like bullocks to a cart. Two uniformed messengers now arrived at the *nazar*'s residence. One of them asked Raghab, 'Hey you cowherd. You came yesterday night, didn't you?' Taken aback, Raghab Mohanty kept staring at him. He thought to himself, 'He is a *jamadar*. He should therefore ask me, "Who are you?" But why did he call me a cowman?' Then he said aloud, 'Yes.' The messenger now asked him, 'What did you bring, milk or curd?' Raghab said, 'Why should I bring milk or curd?' The messenger asked, 'Why? Aren't you the one one who takes out the buffaloes to graze?' This was the limit. Unable to bear the insult, Raghab walked into the house in a huff. True, when the messenger called Raghab a cowherd, he had absolutely no intention of insulting him. From time to time cowherds came from fort Naripur carrying pots of milk and curd. Raghab Mohanty's physical appearance and the way he was dressed did make him look like a cowherd. How could then one blame the poor messenger for mistaking him for one? Raghab Mohanty was a tallish man and was well built like a man who minded buffaloes. He was dark-complexioned, but his dark skin was not beautiful like that of Lord Krishna; it was slightly ashen. His skin did not have an oily smoothness; it was dry and rough. His hair was short and stood up in tufts. Stranger to oil and combs, it had

grown curly like sheep's wool. His face was round like a saucer. His forehead and his nose were rather flat. His nose was small and fat, his cheeks chubby, and his thick lips hung down. The corners of his mouth were white like the corners of a myna's beak. His large teeth lay apart from each other. Writers of books usually liken teeth to pomegranate seeds. But we feel disinclined to compare the teeth of the brother-in-law of an important person with such small seeds. In our judgement, it would be more appropriate to compare them with the seeds of a gourd. His eyes were small and round like those of a pig and his eyebrows were high and hairy. His neck was short and thick. He was narrow-chested. His belly was large like a barrel and of the same size as his chest. His flat arms seemed to be possessed of a great deal of strength. The length of his hand from his wrist to his elbow was shorter than was normal and the palm of his left hand was slightly deformed. His legs were ungainly like pieces of wood, but they were nimble and strong from long experience of tending cattle. Since he used to spend all day in the sun, wandering in the fields and plodding through water it was but natural that his skin had become hard and dry. He wore a dirty *dhoti* that reached down to his knees, and a shabby cotton towel was thrown across his shoulder.

Reduced to tears by the humiliation, Raghab went and complained bitterly to his sister. His mother, Mangala Dei came running in and said angrily, 'Bishki, my dear. May witches devour that fellow, may his life get cut short. Did you hear what terrible things he said to my child in the house of his relative? Go and tell our dear son-in-law of this and get that fellow rebuked.'

Bishki Dei, too, got terribly cross and reported the matter to her husband immediately. She had expected that he would rush out and scold the messenger. But the *nazar* only looked up at Raghab and said, 'If you dress like this, of course people will talk in that manner to you. You should take care to get properly dressed when you go out.'

Mangala Dei said, 'Bishki, my dear. He walked all day long yesterday and so got covered with dust. This is why he looks a little shabby. Can anyone deny that my Raghab is a good-looking boy? I had given all our clothes to the washerman to wash. As we left in a hurry we could not collect those from him. Give him a clean *dhoti*

and let him rub a little oil on his body, go out and take a bath.'

Before Mangala Dei said this, the *nazar* had sent a messenger to buy a five-yard long *dhoti* from the bazaar. All this, however, he found extremely vexing and he thought to himself, 'He is an evil planet. Now I'll have to go on spending money on him.'

Bishakha Dei said, 'Chitra. Go and call a barber. He'll give Raghab a shave. Then

Raghab will rub oil on his body, go and have a bath. He doesn't know the way to the river. You'll accompany him there. You must not send a messenger with him. You will go with him yourself.'

Chitra said, 'Yes, my lady. This is exactly what I thought I should do. He is new to the place after all. Unless someone led the way he will get lost. Roads in this godforsaken city of Cuttack make strangers go round and round.'

A barber came and began shaving Raghab. Dirt clung to the razor's edge like lumps of mud. From time to time the barber threw a sly glance at Chitra, and the two exchanged smiles. Raghab's nails were long, thick and hard like those of a bear and would not yield easily to the nail-cutter. Chitra said to the barber, 'See how our dear brother's heel and soles have cracked from walking yesterday. Cut away the dead skin.'

The work of cutting away the dead skin seemed to go on and on. Flakes of dead skin now lay in a heap. While the barber was at work, Raghab felt tickled. But what could he do. He sat, biting his lips and closing his eyes. His work over, the barber said, 'See. The edges of four nail-cutters have got blunted. They cost not less than four pice.'

Chitra said, 'Don't you worry. Do your work properly. I'll talk to my lady and give you the money.'

Bishakha Dei brought a bowl full of mustard oil and said, 'Chitra. Rub this on my child's body.'

Chitra said, 'Yes. Yes. I'll do so.' But she thought to herself, 'She talks as if I am dying to do this.' There was no doubt that her soft hands would have been ripped up if she had run them on Raghab's skin, which was hard like a rhino's. So she pointed with her fingers, saying, 'Rub oil here, rub that place hard.' Raghab's dry skin sucked all the oil in the bowl in no time. Chitra went in and brought some

more oil from the *nazar*'s wife. After all this was rubbed into Raghab's body, his skin looked a little oily.

By the time Raghab came back after taking a bath in the river, new clothes had been brought for him from the market. He and his mother felt overjoyed. He put on the new clothes and took a good look at himself. Mangala Dei asked, 'Tell me, my dear Chitrakala. Isn't my son a fine-featured boy?'

Chitrakala said, 'My lady. That stupid messenger was blind. Don't the others have eyes to see? Let's take a stroll in the village and see if there is anyone who dare say he is not handsome." However, she smiled to herself and thought, 'If this fellow walks down the village path in the evening, children will take him for a ghost and run away, scared.'

Bishakha Dei got someone to purchase two shirts and two shawls without the *nazar*'s knowledge. For quite a few days Raghab found it difficult to walk, for his feet got entangled in the long wide *dhotis*. But so what? Once he got dressed up, Raghab simply could not stay at home. Under some pretext or the other he would go out onto the road and walk around the servants and messengers. He would look at the faces of people passing by to find out if they noticed what he was wearing. He often wished, Bhika, Makra, Bhima and Benga, his friends in the village, could see the clothes he had put on.

Chapter Forty-five
Prabhudayal Bhagat

Ramdayal Bhagat hailed from Bihar. He was a moneylender. He had come to Cuttack as the servant of a rich businessman. Commerce blesses people with prosperity. Using the little money he received as his salary as capital, Ramdayal started trading in spices. His business prospered and his capital now amounted to more than a hundred thousand rupees. He had also invested nearly twentyfive thousand rupees in his money-lending business. Apart from the interest on the loans, he also made good money from gifts and *todasalami*. He had to spend very little, for he kept no servants and did all the house-work himself. Two five-cubit long *dhoti*s made from thick coarse cloth and two small shirts made from the same kind of cloth lasted him a full year. He had bought a turban made from red velvet cloth. This would do for him for another ten years. A thick woollen shawl helped him cope with the four winter months. When the weather grew warmer he would dust it and store it away. No one had ever seen him use any winter wear except this shawl. To him, giving even a handful of rice to a beggar seemed an utter waste of money. How could he even think of inviting home any of his relatives?

It is often observed that God never gives a person everything. Ramdayal owned so much property, but who would inherit it after he was gone? He was childless, but this never bothered him, for, he felt that, one had everything in the world if he had money. But not having a child caused his wife a great deal of pain. She prayed to gods and goddesses and observed all kinds of rites in the hope of being blessed with a child. At last, God took pity on the couple and a son was born to them. The joy of the old man and his wife

knew no bounds. The old woman did nothing all day except holding her dear son in her lap. He was named Prabhudayal, which meant he was a gift from the merciful Lord. The child grew up. He must receive an education. So a Bihari teacher was appointed to teach him the *kaethi* alphabet for an hour every day. After a lot of negotiations it was decided that the teacher would receive a salary of one rupee a month.

One day, Ramdayal Bhagat went to the court to depose in a lawsuit. This was his first and last visit to a court of law. There he saw the judge seated on a throne. Hundreds of people were present there to pay their respects to him. Ramdayal, too, bowed reverentially to him. He again saw that a lawyer came and said a few things before the judge. He then collected a handful of coins from someone, which he put into his pocket. This impressed Ramdayal immensely. He talked to a few people and learnt that the judge and the lawyer had come to occupy these high positions because they had read English. He thought that if he gave Prabhudayal an English education he would become a judge, or failing that, at the very least, a lawyer. He came home and told his wife of what he had in mind and the old woman felt ecstatic.

Arrangements were made for teaching Prabhudayal English. When it came to spending money on other things, Ramdayal felt as if spending one rupee was like shedding a drop of his own blood. But when it came to spending money on giving Prabhudayal an English education, the old man threw open his money box. After all, who should he save money for? One thought now possessed the old man: no matter if I lose all my money, but my Prabhudayal must become an officer. Needless to talk about the old woman. She was even more excited than her husband. People from his caste remonstrated with the old man, saying, 'What are you doing, Ramdayal? Money lending is the occupation people of our caste have been following for generations. Why do you want your son to become somebody's servant? You want him to learn English, fine. But make him engage in your family trade.'

It is not to be expected that people from his caste would be able to understand everything. Old Bhagat went around saying that they talked like this because Prabhudayal was going to take

up a job. No one therefore should listen to them. Already the effects of an English education on Prabhudayal were becoming visible. His father did all his work sitting on a reed mat. Prabhudayal's room, however, was now crammed with tables and chairs. After all, he must prepare himself to become an officer.

Men are mortal. Ramdayal was an old man. One day, he died. His wife had passed away a month before her husband's death. Prabhudayal was now absolutely free to do as he liked. He had also come into his inheritance. After attending school for eight to ten years, he had managed to get promoted to the second class from the third. Now he had to look after his property. So he discontinued his studies.

He now counted among his friends eight or ten sons of rich people. He also dressed up and went to a number of public meetings. He memorised several lectures by addressing a few meetings. How could such a person associate with people of his own caste, who were uneducated, and led a shabby life? People from his caste weighed goods sitting on the ground. If he followed their example, what was the point in working so hard for years and receiving up an English education? Moreover, why should he bring himself to do such menial jobs? Did he want for anything? In the past, Prabhudayal used to go out in the evening and sing and play musical instruments. We learnt from his friends that he had a sweet voice and sang well. Musical parties went on at his residence from evening till midnight every day. Prabhudayal also hosted dinners for his friends at home on most days in a month. Needless to say, the food and the drinks served on these occasions were up to his friends' expectations.

People from Prabhudayal's caste anxiously watched how he conducted himself. He never paid any heed to the advice of any relative. He accepted food from a lowly woman in the bazaar. When this fact came to their knowledge, the caste association promptly excommunicated him.

In a matter of two or three years, all Prabhudayal's property melted away. It was said that his property was too little to repay his debts. In fact, one by one, all his assets got auctioned off. At last, he lost even his house. He lay drunk most of the time and

never bothered about what was happening to him. Money flowed out like water. How long could anyone's property last if he allowed it to be squandered in this manner?

Prabhudayal had read in a book about the son of a big landlord in Russia, who, when he lost all his property, chose to become a watchman rather than approach any relative for help. The man was endowed with great mental strength: even so great a misfortune did not upset him. All that mattered was finding enough money for his drinks, which he used to take in the evening everyday. He decided he, too, should look for the job of a *piada*. *Piada*s earned a lot of money on the side, in addition to their salary. He collected information from a woman in the bazaar and went to meet the *nazar*. Prabhudayal's handsome appearance, his winning manner of talking created a very favourable impression on Natabar. Since Prabhudayal also knew English, Natabar thought he would prove very useful to him. He made up his mind to engage him as a *piada*. It was settled that Prabhudayal would get the job if he could present the *nazar* with a sum of one hundred rupees. While trying to arrange this amount and waiting to land the job, Prabhudayal kept visiting the *nazar*'s residence. He came across Raghab there a couple of times and formed an idea of his situation. He was very sharp indeed. One morning he went up to Raghab and said, 'Ram, Ram Raghab baboo, Ram Ram.'

Raghab felt thrilled. In his village everyone called him Raghua Mohanty. Now he had instantly turned into a baboo. But he wondered what 'Ram Ram' meant. He did not know how to respond to the greeting. So he did nothing except stand and grin.

Prabhudayal, a clever man, grabbed his hand and pulled it a couple of times as Englishmen did. In no time the two became fast friends. We have no intention to try the patience of our readers by giving an elaborate description of how their mutual love blossomed. We would only say in brief that in a very short time the two friends wandered all over the town, made visits to places where men from good families would never go, attended musical sessions, and enjoyed dance programmes. For Raghab baboo these were exciting and marvellous new experiences. It was extremely

unlikely that the news of activities that occupied him these days would ever reach his village. The day he drank a little foreign liquor for the first time in his life he thought to himself, 'It is written in books that gods in heaven imbibe nectar. No doubt this is the same divine stuff.' He was convinced that Prabhudayal was one of those gods and he, himself, had got deified. He had never ever in the past experienced such bliss. Prabhudayal, for his part, thought that a hunter who wanted to eat the meat of a *dahuka* bird trapped it by luring it through a tame *dahuka*. He had found a *dahuka* in Raghab; he must, therefore, take very good care of him in order to get what he wanted. Everyone knew that there was a lot of money in the *nazar*'s residence, which lay in the care of a stupid woman. But there was no way of laying one's hand on it earlier. Prabhudayal now thought that at last it had come within his reach.

One day Prabhudayal said, 'My dear friend. You know we have to spend some money every night. At the moment I am short of money and it will be some time before I receive money from Calcutta. Please manage the expenses for a few days. Once money arrives from Calcutta all our problems will end.'

Raghab baboo— My friend. Where will I get money from? I have no money at all.

Bhagat thought to himself, 'You think your father had left money with me so that you would have a good time every day?' But he said aloud, 'How can you say so, my friend? Everyone in Cuttack knows that your sister is a queen. You are a baboo, after all. How can you say you don't have money? Let me tell you, my friend, the *nazar* hands the cash to your sister when he comes back from the cutcherry. The money is left lying in a recess in the wall or under a pillow on the bed for two or three days before your sister puts it into a box. All you have to do is to take some money from this. But make sure you never take all of it at one go.'

Raghab sat quietly for some time. A shiver ran down his spine. Prabhudayal understood his problem. He said, patting him on the back, 'Don't worry, my friend. Have no fear. I am confident that you can get the money.'

Raghab baboo realised that he had no other option but to get the money. What would his friend feel if he did not? Moreover, if he did not, their merry-making would also come to an end. For a few days after this, money was no problem. Raghab felt scared at the beginning, but soon he grew confident. However, for some strange reason, these days, his sister put the money into a box and locked it up as soon as she received it and no longer left it lying outside. But a man like Prabhudayal was not to be easily outdone. Duplicate keys for the locks of the chests and money-boxes were quickly made with the help of wax tablets. Their problems were over.

So many things happened, but the nazar knew nothing about these at all. Work kept him occupied from morning till midnight. Mangala Dei always said to her daughter, 'My Bishki. Your wealth will never run out for you are Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Your orphaned little brother has no one except you to turn to. Be kind to him.' Bishakha Dei, for her part, was very kind to her younger brother and trusted him deeply.

Chapter Forty-six
Affairs of Naripur Estate

The court remained closed on Sundays. On these days the *nazar* went to the sahib's bungalow in the morning and made himself useful there. He spent the Sunday afternoon in the cutcherry at his residence looking into the records of the Naripur estate. Today, a crowd had thronged up the cutcherry. Ten to twelve supplicants were present there. They were there to complain against some officials of the estate, who had dealt unfairly with them. Four paiks carrying letters from these officials were also present at the cutcherry. The *nazar* silently went through the report sent by the *maqadam* of Makrampur, Madan Mohanty and asked, 'Is Bhima Samal present here?' When the peon cried, 'Bhima Samal, come over here,' a man came in and threw himself at the *nazar*'s feet.

The *nazar* said, with contempt, 'Hey you, say what you have got to tell me. Why do you lie down like this?' Samal did not get up and said, lying on the ground, 'Please listen to my prayer. Six members of my family will perish. Stick a knife in my neck or give me a little poison. I want to die here.'

The *nazar* – You idiot. If you want to die go and do so elsewhere. Tell me what you want to say.

Samal – You are justice incarnate. Please consider my case. I own seven acres of land near our village, which have been in the possession of seven generations of our family. But the *maqadam* has taken a bribe of one hundred rupees from Sama Sahu, the moneylender and is going to give this plot of land to him. I'll hang myself if he does so.

The *nazar* – But the *maqadam* writes to say that he has received eighty rupees from you. You are a bloody liar.

Samal – I shall swear by the flower offered to Lord Juagal Kishore and say that he has taken one hundred rupees from me.

The *nazar* – All right. We shall enquire into this matter. Peon. Throw this man out.

Samal left the place, crying.

Now the peon called other supplicants to come forward. Five to six supplicants flung themselves at the *nazar*'s feet at the same time. The *nazar* lost his temper and said, 'The rascals always gang up, always do things together.' A peon explained to the supplicants, 'Whatever you want to say, say one at a time.'

Bauri Barik – Sir, my land revenue including the interest amounts to six rupees nine *anna*s and two pice per year. This is the amount I used to give when late zamindar was alive. Your record-keeper added all kinds of charges to this and demanded eight rupees and eight *anna*s. I paid this amount. Now he says I still owe two rupees and six annas. My lord, I leave my children in your care for I am going away. Where will I get the money from?

The *nazar* – You expect me to support your family, don't you? As if I have nothing better to do. Well, show me the receipts for the money you say you have given.

Barik – Sir. He did not give me a receipt. He is an officer, after all. I repeatedly asked for a receipt but he never gave me one.

The *nazar* – That troublemaker, old Rangadhar has sent you here, hasn't he? All right. Go. I will look into this matter when I go on a tour of the *mofussil*. Who is that fellow standing next to him? What is your problem?

Makra Sahu – Master, I borrow rice from the zamindar's granary every year. I have repaid all my debts with interest. But, this year, the man in charge of the granary refuses to loan out rice to me. He says, 'All the rice in the granary has already been sold off.' You, who are justice incarnate, please let me borrow one *bharana* of rice, or else five of us in my family will die like dogs.

The *nazar* – Our old employees and our tenants have the same intention. Under the pretext of taking loans, they have taken away all the rice from the zamindar's granary. Do you mistake me for your late zemindar? He cut himself short when his eyes fell on Naru

baboo's room. He now said, 'My nephews are children. I must be extra careful while managing their affairs, mustn't I?'

There were ten, twelve supplicants waiting for their turns. But the *nazar*'s way of dispensing justice scared them, and they all quickly ran away.

It was learnt from Karuna that the way the *nazar* dealt with the grievances of the tenants that day made Naru baboo's face turn pale and brought tears to his eyes.

The *nazar* was a short-tempered man. He had grown even more short-tempered under the pressure of all kinds of vexing things he had to do in the course of discharging his official duties. Nevertheless, earlier he used to speak nicely to the tenants, for, being a clever man, he knew that tenants were like a flock of crows, who, once they got scared, would fly away and never come back to him. However, during the last four or five months, he kept sending letters in sealed envelopes to his officials urging them to collect as much money as possible from the tenants employing whatever means available for he badly needed money. His officials had set to work to please their master.

Chapter Forty-seven
I'll Make You a Queen

The *nazar* felt extremely tired after a hard day's work. He would have a wash after returning from the cutcherry. Before serving him any refreshments, Bishakha Dei would hand him a small glass full of a red-coloured English medicine. This medicine the nazar called dilkhos. He would say, 'My dear, give me a glass of dilkhos.' The moment he imbibed this medicine, all his problems seemed to disappear. This was the time of the day when a cheerful mood came over the nazar. Before he went out for a stroll in the bazaar, he would spend an hour or so talking sweetly to his wife. This was the time set apart for talking about domestic matters and for exchanging small talk.

Today, the nazar had earned quite a bit at the cutcherry. The medicine he had taken in the evening had created the right mood in him. He seemed very cheerful. Suddenly, without preparing her for it, he said, 'Listen to me. I'll make you a queen.'

Bishakha Dei – But I am already a queen.

The *nazar* burst out laughing and said, 'That's strange. Since when did you become a queen?'

Bishakha — Why? My mother and Chitra call me a queen. And the old woman who comes every morning to beg for alms calls me a queen. I know I am a queen.

The *nazar*— No, no. That does not make you a queen. I'll make you a real queen.

Bishakha—Why don't you do so quickly? Make me a queen today.

The *nazar*—Do you think it is such an easy thing to do? One needs to adopt so many strategies and spend a lot of money to do

this. Listen to me. Beware. Keep the matter a closely guarded secret. If anyone gets to wind of this, everything will come to nought. Let me tell you that, unless you come into possession of the Naripur estate, you'll never be able to become a queen.

Bishakha— Why? Naripur belongs to us, doesn't it? The money collected towards land revenue is brought to our house. So many things from the estate also come to our house. We own the zamindari, don't we?

The *nazar*— No, no. We don't. We are not the owners of the zamindari. Naru baboo is its real owner. We are only managing it on his behalf.

Bishakha – How strange? You, who are an officer, are not the owner and the zamindari belongs to that mere boy!

The *nazar* – No, no. True, he now owns it. But there is one way in which it could pass into our hands. This year we will not deposit the land revenue on the day appointed for its collection. The zamindari will then get auctioned off. We'll buy it through someone else but we need a lot of money to succeed in our plan. I have found a moneylender. I think things will work out now.

What the *nazar* said did not make any sense to Bishakha Dei. She simply gaped at her husband's face and said, 'No, no. You'll become the owner of the zamindari. How could this monkey of a boy be the zamindar? I have a hundred or two hundred rupees with me. I'll give you all that money. Go and give it to the sahib, and become the owner of the zamindar and make me a queen.'

The *nazar* only smiled and said nothing. Then he picked up his prayer bag and went out to take a stroll.

Chapter Forty-eight
Naru baboo Leaves His Uncle's House

It was around ten at night. Raghab Mohanty came back home from the bazaar and sat down beside Naru baboo on the four-poster. He said loudly, 'My dear nephew' and went on talking incoherently. He pulled out the books and scattered them all over the floor. His body and his mouth gave off a terrible stench. Naru baboo would have thrown up if he had not held a corner of his *dhoti* tightly against his nostrils. Raghab threw away the book Naru baboo was reading. This was not the first time Naru baboo had to endure such behaviour on Raghab's part. But what happened today far exceeded the limits of endurance. So he said, 'Every day you take some strange stuff at the bazaar before you come home. Your mouth stinks and you talk like a mad man. I'll tell *mamu* of this tomorrow in the morning.'

Raghab Mohanty quickly left Naru baboo's side and lay down on his own bed. A strange fear gripped him. When something scares a drunken man, he gets terribly nervous and it keeps oppressing him. Sleep did not come to his eyes. He lay still like a corpse on the bed. He thought that Naru would tell his brother-in-law about him. Sure enough, his brother-in-law would turn him out of the house. Of course, he would go back to his village, but would he ever have there the good times he was having at Cuttack? Sleep overcame him as he kept mulling over these problems. It was broad daylight when he woke up.

Prabhudayal waited outside for his bosom friend. But he could not call him, only kept talking so that his voice would reach his friend's ears. The moment Raghab got up he heard the voice of his friend. His head was feeling heavy and his body refused to move. The old fear returned. He wanted to rise but could not. Once again

Prabhudayal's voice carried to him. An idea suddenly occurred to him, 'My friend is an extremely clever person. He will certainly find a way out.' The thought nerved him. Leaving his bed, he went straight to his friend. The two sat in a quiet place and held a long discussion. Raghab Mohanty now felt very cheerful. Prabhudayal said to him, 'Go and repeat to your sister whatever I have said, word for word. Weep when you tell her all this and don't omit even a word.'

Raghab Mohanty entered the inner wing of the house, sobbing, 'Sister. Listen. Naru hurled a lot of abuse at me.' His sister asked, 'What did he say to you? Tell me. I'll find out what the matter is. Don't cry, my dear boy.'

Raghab Mohanty said, 'Naru called me a rascal and a slave who lived on leftover food. He said that I am a hanger-on in his uncle's house and that he would ask his uncle to throw me out of it.' Bishakha Dei roared, 'How dare he say such things to you? Who is he that he would scold you? Don't cry. Don't cry.'

Raghab continued, still sobbing, 'Naru goes out and wanders in the bazaar daily from evening till midnight. You stay in the inner wing of the house. How could you find out about what he does? When he comes back, his mouth stinks for he takes some intoxicants while in the bazaar. I said, "Naru baboo. You have come to Cuttack to study. Why should you roam in the bazaar?" Let me tell you another thing: that barber eats the *puri*s and the curry you send every day with such care to Naru, who goes to bed after taking some intoxicating stuff in the bazaar. Last Thursday, you went to so much trouble to prepare *puri*s and cakes. They tasted so delicious. I licked my fingers when I ate them. But Naru pushed them away with his leg, saying that maidservants in his house cooked better dishes than those.' Saying this gave Raghab a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction, for this was not something he had learnt from his friend but something he himself had thought up using his own intelligence.

Mangala Dei came running in. Crying, she wiped her son's face with the end border of her saree and said, 'Listen to me, my dear Bishki. One slap will send that monkey flying to a far-off place and he had the guts to say such nasty things to your little brother. He was scolding Raghab this morning. I stood at the doorstep and listened. I thought to myself he was scolding someone else. Had I known he

was abusing my dear Raghab, I would have rushed in and called you to listen yourself.'

Raghab said, correcting her, 'No, no. He did not scold me this morning. He did so yesterday night.'

Mangala Dei said, 'Yes. You are right. Last night I went to bolt the door. That was when I heard him abuse you.'

Bishakha Dei was convulsed with rage. She could not wait to send for Naru. She ran out. The upper part of the doorframe of the entrance to the outer wing hung rather low. Her head banged against it hard. She would have crashed had she not sat down. A huge lump the size of a frog appeared on her forehead. She kept rubbing it with her left hand.

The lump burned and her heart burned, too. She rose to her feet somehow a few moments later. She placed one foot on the threshold and held the upper part of the doorframe with both her hands and screamed, 'Naru. Naru. Hey Naru.' The scream struck terror into Naru baboo's heart. He trembled before his aunt just as a pupil does before a cane-wielding *abadhan*. Fear and humiliation made his throat go dry.

His aunt roared, 'Naru. Isn't your Raghab uncle like your father? You are but a child and you dare call him a rascal and an eater of leftover food. Who is an eater of leftover food? Who is a hanger-on here? If your *mamu* had not looked after your zamindari out of pity it would have disappeared long since.'

Mangal Dei added, 'This is the *Kali* era, after all. One should never do anyone a good turn in this evil era.'

Naru baboo's aunt was gone after scolding him. He now stood still like a wooden puppet. The world around him seemed to grow dark. Tears streaked his cheeks. Saraswati Dei, and Naru's grieving mother, come and see for once how miserable your darling, the delight of your eyes, the repository of all your hopes, looks as he stands here.

Naru baboo remained standing like this. It seemed as if he would come crashing down if someone gave him the slightest push. He seemed to have lost consciousness. Now Chitrakala arrived, saw him and heard all about what had happened. She was always very fond of Naru baboo and felt a deep affection for him. But she dared not

get close to him for fear of annoying her mistress, the *nazar*'s wife. She had tried to gauge her mistress's attitude on a couple of occasions in the past and had found that, whenever she expressed any affection for him, her mistress frowned on her. Chitrakala looked upon Raghab Mohanty as no better than a country bumpkin. Only to please her mistress did she use 'brother dear' or some such terms of endearment while addressing him.

Chitrakala took Naru baboo by the hand and said, 'Don't take what your aunt said in anger to your heart. She will again show you affection in a moment.' But she thought to herself, 'How on earth could this woman, who is fit to mind swine, recognize the worth of this son of a god-like person?' She led him gently into his room and left him there. As it happened, just at that moment Karuna was away; he had gone off to the bazaar. Naru baboo did not feel like staying in the room. So he went out. At the main gate of the Nazar's residence he came upon Raghab and Prabhudayal, who were laughing heartily, for victory had been theirs. Naru baboo and Raghb came face to face and their eyes met.

Raghab seemed excited. Naru baboo, for his part, fled in fear as if he was escaping a tiger and came onto the road.

He kept walking down the road, hanging his head, for he was too embarrassed to be able to look anyone in the face. He thought that everyone had heard his aunt scolding him. He walked on and on. Someone, having rubbed his body with oil, was brushing his teeth sitting on the riverbank. May be he would take a bath in the river. Naru baboo walked past him straight ahead, without bothering about where the road was taking him. The man could see that, if the boy took two more steps, he would fall off the stone embankment into the river. So he warned him, shouting at the top of his voice, 'O young baboo.' This made Naru baboo stop dead. He saw that he stood on the edge of the embankment and the river lay below. He stopped for a while and then retraced his steps. He sat down under a large banyan tree, which stood close to the river, and panted, resting his head on his knees. His body was covered with sweat. The cool breeze blowing in from the river dried it somewhat.

A gentleman, his body rubbed with oil and a neatly folded towel thrown across his shoulder, was on his way to the river to take his

bath. A barber, carrying a *pata* cloth rolled in a white towel and a silk umbrella in his left hand and a pair of shoes in his right, followed him. When he stood on the stone embankment, the gentleman's eyes fell on a young boy sitting under the banyan tree, his head hung low. It seemed he was crying. To the gentleman it seemed as if he knew the boy. He approached the boy slowly, stood beside him for a while and took a good look at him. He asked, 'You are Naru, aren't you?' Naru baboo looked up and saw his *mausa* standing in front of him. In great confusion, he rose to his feet. Unable to control himself he let out a loud wail. His *mausa* said nothing; he only let his eyes move from Naru baboo's toes to his head a couple of times. How could he now proceed to take his bath? He took Naru baboo by the hand and made his way back to his residence. The sweat on Naru baboo's body had not dried up yet. Two barbers now set to work on fanning Naru baboo and wiping the sweat with his *mausa*'s own towel. A servant started rubbing Naru baboo with scented oil. Mausa sent two *paik*s, who were accompanied by four bearers and two servants of his own to the *nazar*'s residence, telling them, 'Go and bring all Naru baboo's effects from the residence of Natabar Das. Ask Karuna to come with you. I warn you. Do not listen to anyone there and make sure you bring everything that belongs to Naru baboo.'

Chapter Forty-nine
The Nazar's Wife Repents

Human beings act rashly in a fit of anger. When anger subsides, they repent for their deeds. When Naru baboo left the house Bishakha Dei felt nervous. 'Why did I scold that boy? I wonder what my husband will say when he comes home. May be he will be very cross with me,' she thought. Mangala Dei comforted her, saying, 'Why do you worry so much? When my son-in-law comes, we'll tell him that we said nothing to Naru. He went away for no good reason at all. Moreover, we'll say that, he showered abuse on his uncle and his aunt as he walked down the road.'

Chitrakala said, 'No, no. Don't say such things. Keep quiet. When master comes, I'll explain everything to him.'

The *nazar*, as usual, had got up early and gone off to the sahib's bungalow. He was completely in the dark about all that had come to pass at his house in his absence. He came back home around ten in the morning. Chitrakala was waiting for him. She rushed to him the moment he crossed the threshold as if a great calamity had struck the family. She said to him, her voice full of anxiety, 'Do you know what had happened, master? Shortly after you left for the sahib's bungalow, that black-faced *mausa* of Naru babu came here accompanied by forty or eighty men and carried off all Naru baboo's belongings. My mistress's mother and I myself pleaded with them, saying, 'Please wait for our master to come. But who would listen to us? Brother Raghab and I were so furious we would have bitten into the cheeks of eight, ten men. But there were more than eighty of them. What could we do? Our mistress sits there and weeps since they left.' Mangala Dei and Bishakha were immensely pleased with

Chitrakala. In their knowledge, no one in the world was cleverer or worthier than Chitrakala.

At first, the *nazar* got furious when he heard everything. Then anger gave way to feelings of sadness. He thought to himself, ruefully, 'All I had to spend on Naru never exceeded thirty rupees a month, but I used to enter two hundred and fifty rupees in the account book. Now I am going to lose so much money.' His wife thought, 'Dhaima used to send so many kinds of sweets and cakes from the palace. We used to get good ghee, cheese, fine rice and green gram from the palace. Now these won't be sent any more.' But Mangala Dei and Raghab felt very happy for they thought a thorn had been removed from their path. The *nazar* went to the cutcherry and threatened the *peshkar* that he would report the matter to the sahib. The *peshkar* cut him short, saying, 'Be careful. Don't take the matter too far. The consequences will shock you.'

Chapter Fifty
The God-brother

Tasya vistaritabudhih tailabinduribambhasi.
(His guile is pervasive like a drop of oil spreading on water.)

Chitrakala was a maidservant. So whenever her absence in the *nazar*'s residence created any difficulty, the nazar went over to her house to call her. We have the *nazar*'s word for making such a statement. We must take it as true, for why else should such an important person like the *nazar* go to the house of a mere maidservant. The *nazar* always went to call her after eight at night. God knows why, today, he arrived there in the evening. He found a young man sitting on a reed mat in Chitrakal's bedroom. Chitrakala was preparing *paan*. The two were talking and laughing. The *nazar* stopped dead. It seemed as if anger spread through his whole body like a flash of lightning. He had often seen this man on the road running in front of Chitra's house. But finding this person at this time in this place naturally gave rise to feelings of suspicion. The *nazar* now remembered that this man was none other than the one who had prayed to him to give him a job. He demanded, angrily, 'Chitra, who is this man?'

The man got up hurriedly and tried to melt into a wall. Chitrakala saw that the two men trembled like leaves in a coconut frond shaken by the wind. One shivered out of fear, and uncontrollable anger made the other tremble. 'Hi-hi-hi', laughed Chitrakala and said, 'Prabhu, my dear boy. Luck is smiling on you today. You must have set your eyes on an auspicious bird like a white hawk this morning. Take it from me, all your worries have come to an end today. I told you that my master usually

came late, how long would you keep waiting for him? But see how lucky you are. My master arrives when we least expected him to. Master, have mercy on him, please. You had asked him to make a present of one hundred rupees to you. He had managed to collect only fortynine rupees and eight annas after running from pillar to post for a month. I added two four anna coins and made it fifty. He is my god brother. Please take pity on him. Go and throw yourself at my master's feet. Go and fall at his feet.'

Her words were like water poured on a raging fire. The *nazar*'s anger and Prabhudayal's fear began to subside. 'Please wait for a while, master. Let me go and get the money.'Saying this, Chitrakala went and threw her moneybox open. 'Oh I am undone,' she thought. She had let herself get carried away while talking. All she found after searching her box hard was only nine rupees and a few annas. She kept jingling those coins while trying to think of a way of escaping from this tight spot. The *nazar* called, 'Don't worry. You need not give me the money now.' Chitrakala shut the box and let out a sigh of relief. 'All right, then. I'll give the money to you at your residence whenever you ask me to. I won't touch this money. I'll put a *tulsi* leaf in this box. Prabhu. Prepare a hookah for my master,' She said.

In no time Prabhudayal cleaned the pipe of the *hookah* with a length of iron wire. He put tobacco in the *chillum*, blew into it hard and handed the *hookah* to the *nazar*. The *nazar* had not had a smoke for the past one hour. As he took a few deep pulls at the *hookah* a great feeling of relaxation came over him. Chitrakala now talked non-stop. 'Master. My godmother, that is Prabhu's own mother, raised me. Her loving care and kindness is what has made me the young woman I am today. How can I describe her to you, master? If one asked her for something she could never say no. She was like goddess Lakshmi. A godlike person like her passed away and left me behind.' She started weeping and wiped her eyes after a while with the end border of her saree. 'After she departed for her heavenly abode, I stopped going to her house. This younger brother of mine never ever bothered to find out if his wretched sister was alive or dead. No, the thought would not even cross his mind. Today he has come running to me because

he needed my help. Or else would he have had time for me? Look here, Prabhu. If you don't come and call on me now and then, I'll never put in a word for you to my master. Tell me, will you do so?'

Prabhudayal said, 'Of course I will, my sister.' In the mean time he had filled the *chillum* with tobacco a couple of times and kept watching the *nazar*. The *nazar*, for his part, was very pleased. He thought this man would prove very useful.

Chitrakala said, 'Prabhu, my dear. Get rid of your irresponsible boyish ways. You stay close to my master and, take it from me, luck would smile on you.'

Chapter Fifty-one
Madhuban Orchard

Naba palas palas banam purah
Sphutaparag-paragatapankajam
Mrudulatanta latantamalokayat
Sasurabhim surabhim sumanobhareih.

(Spring has brought scarlet flowers/ to palas trees in the forest/ yellow pollen to lilies/ sweet fragrance to sweet-smelling flowers.)

Now-a-days Chandamani Dei found herself able to move about a little. She took little walks inside the palace in the morning and in the evening. One day, in the afternoon, when the sunlight had mellowed, she came to the bathing *ghat* of the big pond in the Madhuban orchard while wandering inside the palace premises. This was the first time in four years that she had gone there.

The Madhuban orchard lay at the back of the palace. The pond lay in the middle of the orchard. The water body spread over an area occupying at least five acres. If one added the wetland on which cranes roamed about, the area of the pond would come to more than seven acres. The name of the pond was Bentasara. Four stone-built *ghats* lay on four sides of the pond, of which the bathing-*ghat* close to the palace was the biggest. A straight road led from the back door of the palace to the *ghat*. The road was as wide as the threshold of the backdoor and was bordered by a low ridge of bricks. It was paved with gravel and had hedges of trimmed *malli* bushes on either side, which grew close together. The bushes looked lovely in spring and summer time when they got laden with tender new leaves and flowers. The zamindar and his wife had strictly forbidden plucking of any

flower from the plants. Flowers blooming at night filled the palace with their sweet fragrance. A circular road ran round the orchard having the other road as its diameter. *Malli* bushes had been planted on either side of this road, too. Yet another road originating from the center of the circle, intersected the perimeter and ran into the garden. The path running round the edge of the pond also looked like a road. All the roads had low brick ridges bordering them and flowering plants like *jai, jui, malli, niali, kunda, kamod, rangani* etc grew on either side of the roads. The late zamindar had brought seedlings of flowering plants such as black prince, lily over from Calcutta and got these planted near the ghats. The orchard was full of trees belonging to native as well as foreign species: mango, jackfruit, guava, lichi, palm, black berry etc. Rows of coconut and areca nut trees adorned the embankment of the pond. The view of lotus and *karabira* flowers glimpsed through the gaps among these trees was beautiful indeed. Innumerable nests of sparrows hung from the branches of coconut palms. The orchard was full of the chirping of small birds. Ten to fifteen orchard keepers, who enjoyed rent-free land used to look after the orchard. Not a single tree ever went unwatered. The space around the base of the trees was always kept clean. If a dry leaf fell there it would be immediately swept off. The roads used to be swept twice a day.

However, since the passing of the zamindar, no one looked after the orchard. The orchard keepers left when the *nazar* made them pay taxes on their rent-free land. It now seemed as if all the monkeys of the world had made the orchard their home. There was no one there to scare them away, to shout and throw a stone at them. The fence around the orchard was gone. About half of the trees in the orchard had died. The villagers had cut down many living trees claiming that these had withered. Flowerpots, in which rose and croton bushes had been planted, were placed on either side of the flight of steps leading down to the water's edge. Now twigs of the dead plants stuck out of the pots. Quite a few pots had rolled off the *ghat*s and lay shattered. The place below the *ghat*s was strewn with potsherds and dry twigs. Lumps of clay and potsherds lay scattered on the ghats. When the zamindar was alive even a kitten of the village dared not get into the orchard. Now the orchard had turned into the grazing

field of the cattle of the village. Leaving the cows to graze, boys minding them played *dalamankudi* on the tree branches and had broken quite a few. They were now the custodians of all the fruits and flowers of the orchard. It was like leaving thieves to police one's property. Earlier the orchard was so clean one would not mind eating rice off the ground there; but now it was overgrown with all kinds of trees and bushes such as bhaincha, anku, baniaghanta, kukurachalia and chakunda. The roads and paths had disappeared. Hares and jackals played about without fear. Maidservants of the palace finished their chores at the ghat before dark for fear of wolves. If they had to come to the pond at night, they came in a group of four or five carrying oil lamps. The pond was now choked with weeds and water hyacinth. A few long-legged cranes walked about on these. Only a small part of the pond near the ghat was fit for bathing. Shoals of small dandei and dasimara fish glittered as they darted about in the water.

Chandamani kept staring now at the pond, now at the orchard, unable to make sense of anything. Like in a dream, the image of the orchard as it used to be flashed through her mind. She saw everything; memories came crowding back, but the mind was unable to grasp anything. How things were in the past and how they appeared now and why things were what they were left her utterly confused. Dhaima was then in the maidservants' quarter and did not know that Chandamani had gone into the orchard. She panicked when she did not find her in the palace and went looking for her everywhere. She ran to the bathing *ghat*, four or five maidservants following her. There she found Chandamani standing still, like a puppet. Dhaima rushed to her and took her into her arms and led her back into the palace, saying, 'Come. Come inside.'

Chapter Fifty-two
Naru baboo Writes a Letter Home

'*Sapratibandham karyam prabhuradhigantum sahayadanena*'
(Malavikagnimitra)
(Through Him alone nagging problems get resolved.)

Her obedient servant, Narahari salutes the feet of Dhaima a hundred times. I am writing this from my residence at Cuttack to say that I am in good health and that everything is fine with me. I trust that Lord Jugal Kishore protects you all. Please tell my mother that I salute her feet a million times. Please tell Siru that we should wait until the results of his minor school examination are published. *Mausa* says that, if he passes, he would come to Cuttack and read English here. I had informed you in my earlier letter that I had been placed in the first division in the entrance examination. I am getting fifteen rupees a month as scholarship. Yesterday, the principal sahib gave me forty-five rupees, the scholarship amount for three months. When I gave this to *mausa* he refused to accept it and asked me to spend it. All my expenses here are met by *mausa*. I have therefore no need for this money. I now send this through Bhim Malla. I am told that you are facing much financial hardship these days. But why? Doesn't Natabar *mamu* give you any money for your expenses?

I am very comfortable here. Since a lot of people visit *mausa*'s house, the place gets rather noisy. *Mausa* has put me up in a large two-storied building so that I could study there undisturbed. Four servants do the housework on the ground floor. Two *paiks* guard the entrance to the building. *Mausa* has instructed them not to go to me unless there is a good reason to do so. Only Karuna stays near me and waits upon me. *Mausa* comes here daily to check if everything

is going well. If I ever fall ill, he never leaves my side even for a moment. *Mamu* has not come to see me since the day I came here. I once ran into him in front of the cutcherry. I bowed to him, but we did not have a talk. You have asked me a number of times to go home. But I have vowed never to return home before passing F.A. I am fine here. Yours etc.

The seventh day of the month of Mesha, sal 1286

Naru baboo put the letter in an envelope, sealed it carefully and sent it through a *paik*. The letter duly arrived at the palace. Dhaima came running out of the palace, shouting 'Naru's letter, Naru's letter.' She took the letter and the packet of money from the *paik*'s hand and kissed and pressed these to her heart again and again. The letter was read in the privacy of the bedroom. Dhaima read it out to Chandamani, who listened to it with rapt attention. Tears flowed from the eyes of both the reader and the listener. For the first time after long seven years tears were seen in Chandamani's eyes and her face was lit up with a cheerful expression. Great rejoicing was heard in the servants' quarter, which vibrated with the sound of conch shells and ululation. Word spread through the village that, pleased with the zamindar's son, the sahib in Cuttack had given him a cash award of five hundred rupees. Someone said, 'No. A thousand rupees.' Someone else contradicted him, saying, 'No, no. Two thousand rupees.' A few people rushed to Haribol Barik to find out what the matter was and the exact amount of the cash award the young zamindar had received. Information about everything was at Barik's fingertips. If anyone needed to find out about anything he came to Barik. To all questions under the sun, Barik had a ready answer. That telling a lie in order to manage a situation and to add to one's importance might be a sin never occurred to Barik. But, he was considerate like Yudhisthir when it came to avoiding having to say something that would harm someone. Now, to people's queries, he made the following answer—Haribol. Dhaima had sent for me. I have just come back from the palace. I myself counted out the coins, put them into cloth bags and tied them up. Two bags carried thousand rupees each and in the third there was one thousand and one rupees. Sahibs do not give anyone a sum of money that ends with a zero.

They have therefore given one rupee extra.

Ram Parida asked, 'What is this all about? I don't understand.' Barik— Haribol. You could not understand such a simple thing? If you write down the number one thousand the last numeral is a zero. He then wrote 1000 on the ground with a piece of charcoal and said, 'See. I have written 1000. It ends with a zero.If you add one to the number you get 1001.'

This explanation pleased everyone. They were convinced that Barik had a head for accounts, too. Barik took this opportunity to share a piece of secret information with everyone and said, 'The Commissioner sahib in Cuttack had written out the order that the late zamindar's son will come riding a palanquin with a band playing and assume the charge of the zamindari.' Barik did not say this off the cuff. He knew much would be gained by putting the idea into people's heads.

Dhaima and Chandamani decided that a harilut would be held at the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore with the scholarship money Naru had received for the first time in his life. The *padhiary* went and called old *Chhamukaran*, Rangadhar Mohanty to the palace. The old *chhamukaran* and Dhaima held a discussion, sitting on either side of the threshold. The old man felt very happy and bowed to Lord Jugal Kishore, taking the name of the Lord twice or thrice. It was settled that the feast would be held at the temple on the day of the *Snana purnima*. Twenty-two *kirtan* parties in the area would be invited. All the tenants of the estate, poor as well as rich, would be invited on behalf of the Lord. Dhaima now handed fortyfive coins to Mohanty. Mohanty picked these up, looked up at Dhaima and gave a little smile. Dhaima understood its meaning and said, 'Don't worry. You set to work. If more money is needed, we'll do something.'

Snana purnima was only four days away. Provisions came pouring in from the *mofussil*. People carrying loads on their heads, loads suspended from either ends of a staff kept streaming into the palace. Someone found a pumpkin lying on his roof. He plucked it and carried it to the palace. Another tenant brought a bunch of bananas from his backyard. After all, a function was being organized to pray to God for bringing the heir of the late zamindar good luck. A grand feast, a *harilut*, was to be held at the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore. Would a more auspicious opportunity ever present itself? Tenants,

rich as well as poor, made their way to the palace eagerly. They brought all kinds of provisions, which lay in heaps as large as mountains in the temple premises. If they were offered the price of what they had brought in, they refused to accept it saying 'Ram Ram' in protest. Rangadhar Mohanty did not have to touch the coins Dhaima had given him. The head cowherd got all cowmen to assemble in one place and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you. Our provider, the young heir of the late zamindar, now lives away from home. This holy feast is being held to pray for his well-being. Offerings made to Lord Jugal Kishore will be taken by a lot of people. So take care. If you do anything wrong, the Lord will visit destruction on your family.' The storeroom of the temple was soon filled with milk, curd, ghee and cheese.

Cooking began one day before the full-moon night, while it was still dark. As many as forty sweetmeat makers set to work on preparing all kinds of cakes and sweetmeats. The sound of *kirtan* came to be heard in the morning from all directions. *Kirtan* parties had started singing on their way to the palace, while they were still a mile from there. All the parties arrived shortly afterwards. Their ecstatic dancing, their wild screams, accompanied by the sound of *mridangam*, cymbals and trumpets resembled the roar of the sea. The sound of conch shells and women's ululation filled the air. Men as well as women had no work on their hands today. They were all feeling very happy. All the *kirtan* parties joined in singing a song, which went like this:

O mind, take the name of Lord Hari
The name of Lord Hari, the name of Lord Hari
If you take His name your heart's desire gets fulfilled
Repeat this name, which is sweet like nectar, and go to heaven
All your worldly goods and near and dear ones will be of no use
When you depart from this world.
Give up vain thoughts and take the name of Lord Hari
He alone is your stay in life and in death.
Lord Hari is your father; He is your mother, too
He is your teacher, the giver of knowledge
He is the provider of the world and he is world of holiness.

Singing non-stop till noon tired out the *kirtan* singers and those who played on musical instruments. To rest themselves they now sat down for a while. Dhaima had arranged for ten *bharans* of rice and molasses to be offered to the Lord before the *prasad* was cooked. *Ukhuda* had been made out of these in the *mofussil*. The *kirtan* singers and others helped themselves to this and washed it down with water. It was a long time before *prasad* was to be served.

The *kirtan* singers now started a learned discussion on music. Their talk turned to the skills of some *mridanga*-palyers and the quality of the singing of some *kirtan* singers in the area. Sri Baania of the party from Mukundpur had quite a reputation as a mridanga player. He now thought that there was no better time than this to display his virtuosity. He threw the *mridangam* across his shoulder, rose to his feet and started beating it: *dhikta*, *tadhina*, *takati*, *tadhina*. He went on dancing and gyrating. From time to time he hung his head and stretched his hand towards other *mridangam* players. This was a challenge which Ram Das, the *mridanga* player of the party from Shyam Nagar could not resist taking up. He got up and started beating his *mridanga*, which went *dhakti*, *tidhakti*.

While this went on for a while, another *mridanga* palyer, Bhima Adhikari shouted, 'This is no good. These beats can be played by anyone. Let's see if you could play the *rudra* beat.' A mridanga player called Radha Das said, 'My brother. First tell us if the *rudra* beat is greater than the *brahma* beat. Now let me show you how the *brahma* beat is played.' The moment he started playing on his mridangam, other *mridanga* players found it difficult to control themselves and started shivering with excitement. They stood up in front of their parties, their *mridangas* slung from their shoulders. The *mridanga* player, who had started learning how to play the instrument only last year, jumped about with the greatest abandon. No one had time for playing *mridanga* according to prescribed rules; they leapt into the air and went on banging on their instruments wildly. The sound of thousands of men shouting 'Haribol' and women ululating made it seem as if an earthquake had taken place. The *mridanga* players seemed to have lost consciousness. Colliding with each other had shattered ten or twelve *mridangas*. Only the skins hung from the players' shoulders. But even this did not make them stop them from

going on playing. Some of them had wound their cotton towels around their heads. These fell on the ground when they shook their heads wildly. People trod these underfoot. The *dhotis* of some players had become loose. The *kirtan* singers realised that things were getting out of hand. They took the *mridanga* players of their own parties by the hand and made them sit down. The players were all bathed in sweat, and they fanned themselves with the ends of their *dhoti*s, taking deep breaths.

It was late afternoon by the time the temple bell rang. There was no space in the *bhoga mandap* to keep the offerings. The forecourt of the temple was cleared and the offerings were kept there in a huge pile, which rose to the height of a tree. The priest, a *tulsi* leaf and holy water in his cupped palm, rang a little bell and offered the food to the deity.

The feast began. First it was the turn of the brahmins. Then it would be the turn of *baishnabas*. The turn of the *babus* would come next. Thousands of *baishnab*s sat in a number of rows. About sixty persons, their towels wound tightly around their waists, busied themselves serving out the dishes. The person in charge of the ceremony stood before the guests and shouted:

Victory to Lord Jugal Kishore
Victory to Lord Brindaban Bihari
Victory to Sri Radharani
Victory to Girigobardhan
Victory to Lord Balagopal
Victory to our Provider
Victory to all Vaishnava sages
Victory to our young zamindar
Victory to his mother, the lady of the house
Victory to Dhaima, his grandmother

Every time he gave a shout the guests joined him. However, when he shouted, 'Take the name of...' all present said in a chorus, 'No, no. You forgot to mention the cooks and the helping hands.' So up went the shout: Victory to the cooks and the helping hands.' Now all shouted in one voice, 'With love in your heart, take the name of Radhe...' The sound of slurping, swallowing, gulping and chewing drowned out the sentence. Someone shouted, 'Give me dal.' Another

shouted, 'You have not given me the bitter curry.' 'Give me *ambila*, give me rice', others shouted. No matter how much food you placed on the leaves spread before the vaishnav sages, they were polished off in no time. Each of the vaishnavas had put two extra leaves on either side of the leaf he was eating off. What were these extra leaves for? They were meant for his wife. After drinking up the water in their tumblers, they filled them with rice pudding. After the vaishnav sages finished eating, the *adhikary* picked up one grain of rice from their leaves and put these into a stone bowl, which he kept covered with a banana leaf. This consecrated food Dhaima, Chandamani and everyone else in the palace were to partake of later.

The other guests now sat down to eat. Who would care for caste distinctions on a day like this? People belonging to thirtysix different castes sat together in one row today. This was a *harilut*, after all. The only sound one heard was, 'Give me rice.' The men who served out the dishes ran breathlessly, sweat running down their legs. It was almost daybreak when the grand feast came to an end. The temple priest went out to take a bath before offering worship to the deity. Dhaima had taken some refreshments in the morning after her bath. After that, she had not touched even a morsel of the *prasad*. She got a shock when she realised that the night had come to an end and that the eastern horizon was turning crimson. She now made her way to the palace, the stone bowl containing consecrated grains of rice in her hand. Two maidservants ran behind her. What a strange sight presented itself to her? Chandamani sat quietly, like a mouse, on the same spot where Dhaima had seated her twenty-four hours ago. Dhaima had a quick wash and wiped Chandamni's face with her wet hand. She put one grain of the holy rice into her own mouth and put another into Chandamani's. Chandamani turned her face away when Dhaima tried to put another grain into her mouth.

Chapter Fifity-three
A Plan

It was afternoon. Chhotray was seated on a small carpet in the *natamandir* of the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore. At a distance of about five cubits from him sat the old *chhamukaran* on the pucca floor. Haribol Barik sat close to the threshold of a door on Chhotray's right side. In the temple that lay right in front of him one glimpsed the end border of a saree or the edge of a veil behind the door. No one was allowed to come to this place to make sure no one got to hear what was discussed here. Two *paik*s, therefore, paced the courtyard, guarding the place. Everyone was quiet and only watched the others' faces. No one said anything. What could they say, after all? They did not know why they were there in the first place. Something seemed to go on only in the mind of Haribol Barik. Chhotray glanced into the temple a couple of times and said, 'Well. Please let us know why we were sent for.' A nose also became visible from behind the temple door once or twice. The *chhamukaran* looked from the one to the other. Chhotray could not keep quiet any longer and asked, looking at the *chhamukaran*, 'What is the matter, Pattanayak?' He knew that Dhaima had sent for him, but he was also aware that it would be indecorous to put the question to her directly. He thought that Pattanayak, who worked in the palace, must be knowing why Dhaima had called him over. This made Haribol Barik feel apprehensive. He thought to himself, 'Oh. My plan has come close to going awry.' The fact was no one had really invited these people, and at the same time they had all been invited to come here. In the morning a messenger went to Chhotray and informed him that Dhaima wanted him to come to the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore in the afternoon and that she had something to tell him. Pattanayak

received the message that Chhotray and Dhaima wanted him to come to the temple. But, in reality, they had nothing to do with sending out these invitations.

The whole thing was, in fact, a carefully laid out plan of Haribol Barik himself, who never did anything without a motive. He had not gone to so much trouble for nothing. Not at all. We know what he really had at the back of his mind. He could not bear to see anyone ill-treating a poor, helpless person. That day, in the morning, one of Natabar baboo's *gumastas*, who was collecting land revenue, dealt two slaps to Hari Mahakud of Nijagarh. This Haribol Barik, who was present there, could not stand. He entered into a heated argument with the *gumasta*. But why should the *gumasta*, who was carrying out the orders of his master, care for what a mere barber like Haribol said? He gave Haribol a piece of his mind. Barik got furious and announced, 'Look here. I know you work on behalf of a powerful man. I can't say anything to you. But listen to me. I am no son of a barber if I don't succeed in literally kicking you out of this area in five days' time.'

Haribol had said this boastfully in the presence of others because his anger had carried him away. Now how would he make good his words and save his face? He had cleverly brought all these three important persons together so that a way out would be found somehow. But now things seemed to be getting out of hand.

Barik threw his cotton towel around his neck, saluted the three important persons present, touching his head to the ground thrice. Then he said, 'Haribol. Before you proceed to tell us what to do, please give me leave to say a few things. The ruler of the land is but a child. And he now lives in a far-off place. What can he know about the affairs of the zamindari? You are our old rulers. You will take the blame if things go wrong. And you will be praised if things run smoothly. The sufferings of the servants and maidservants in the palace move people to tears. The agonies endured by the record-keepers and revenue-collectors who had remained loyal to this family for generations are endless. They belong to the *karana* caste after all and can't think of making a living by working for a wage in someone's fields. So they choose to lie in their homes waiting for the worst to come. The tenants no longer find even torn clothes to cover their

bodies with. To make matters worse, they receive blows if they ever dare open their mouths. As you know, tenants are like a flock of crows; they will gather in one place and caw noisily if they grow discontented. Last Thursday, on the market day, five or ten thousand tenants assembled at the marketplace in village Nuapur and discussed a plan of going to Cuttack and bringing their sufferings to the sahib's notice. I arrived there. It seemed to me that a terrible thing was going to happen and that our land, our providers and our families will fall into disgrace. I implored them, pleading, "Let us first bring the matter before our own rulers. We'll go to Cuttack only if they do not listen to us." They have sent me to bring their grievances to your attention. Be so kind as to let me know what you propose to do.'

All the three—Dhaima, Chhotray and the *chhamukaran*— hung their heads when they heard him out. Each of them blamed himself or herself for everything, and feelings of guilt and embarrassment overcame them. Dhaima thought to herself, 'Nata became the custodian of the zamindari only because I put Chanda's seal on the report.' Chhotray thought, 'If I had gone to Cuttack to inquire into the matter in the beginning, that young fellow Nata could not have made so much mischief.'

A moment later, the *chhamukaran* let out a heavy sigh and said, 'Well. Whatever has happened has happened. What is to be done now?' Barik stood up and suggested, 'Haribol. There is a simple solution to the problem. I'll sort it out in a day if I am allowed to. I suggest that we give the record keepers from Cuttack a thrashing and take the records from them by force. Everyone around here is our man. Where would they find witnesses who would depose against us? Our old record keepers will collect land revenue and deposit it at the government treasury. What concerns the sahib is money. When that is deposited, he won't bother about anything else.' This made everyone present burst into laughter. Chhotray said, 'No. This is a matter concerning the government. There will be trouble.'

The *chhamukaran* suggested, 'All right, then. Let's ask them to explain the accounts. We'll find out what mischief they have been up to.'

Chhotray—Even for doing this we would need permission from the government. However, we could do one thing: we could write to

the government describing the situation in the palace and the zamindari and seek its permission to let us examine the accounts. What does Dhaima think of this suggestion?

Dhaima— I am a mere woman. What do I know? What can I say? Whatever Chhotray wants should be done. He should write to Pitambar baboo asking him to consult lawyers and *muktars* in Cuttack. We'll act on whatever advice they give us.

This, however, was not at all to Haribol Barik's liking. He had hoped that he would be ordered to run and snatch the bundle of records from that *gumasta*. Later, he consoled himself with the thought that

To think before one acts
Is to stay out of danger

Chapter Fifty-four
The *Nazar* Grows Cautious

A snake always remains sharply observant. News about the discussion held at the temple duly reached the *nazar*'s ears. He felt a little shaken. He mulled over the matter for a moment. He had to wait for only four more months. Things had to be managed tactfully during this period. He too believed that tenants were like a flock of crows. Once they got agitated it would be difficult to control them. Again, if the report about the palace and the zamindari reached the sahib, trouble would certainly follow. He had to do something quickly, and he should not leave the task to someone else, for it demanded great tact and caution. He threw the shawl over his shoulder and went out. Soon afterwards he arrived at Naru baboo's doorstep. Saying 'My dear Naru, Naru, my dear,' he climbed the steps that led to the room upstairs in the two-storied building. Naru baboo was busy working at his studies at the time. Seated in a chair in front of him Pandit Mrityunjay Vidyabhushan explained the meaning of the *sloka*, which went 'so*hamajanmashudhanamaphalodaykarmanam*.' Naru baboo had his gaze fixed on the text of *Raghubansa*, like a heron watching intently a dandei fish. Naru baboo stood up when he saw his uncle. 'Sit down, my dear,' said the *nazar* and pulled a chair and flopped into it. Then he said, '*Pandite*. I have to talk to my nephew alone.' The poor pandit quietly left the room and descended the staircase. Karuna, a wicked fellow, emerged from god knows where and hid himself behind the door which lay behind Naru baboo. He chose a place where he would be able to hear what the *nazar* said but where he himself would remain invisible to the latter. No one knew the *nazar* better than Karuna did.

'My dear Naru. You are not my nephew; you are my son. You are my very lifeblood. You two boys are the apples of my eyes. Twice every day, in the morning and in the evening, I find out about how you are doing and how your studies are progressing. Do you know how hard I worked to please your examiners to help you pass your examination? They showed me your answer scripts. I found that your marks fell short of the aggregate pass marks by four marks. I was shattered. It was like a bolt from the blue.' Then he whispered, 'Keep this a secret. A lot of money had to be spent to set things right. I regularly visit this place and go round this house. I enquire about how you are doing, about your studies. I never meet you for I don't want to disturb your studies. I tell myself, "What's the point in meeting Naru. Let him concentrate on his studies. Studies are what really matters. One acquires a great deal of knowledge by working at one's studies. You should work hard. You must not waste time wandering in the bazaar in the morning and in the evening. If you are possessed of good qualities, you'll command everyone's respect. Why should you take up a job? You are the son of a king and you will become a king. Do you know why I came here today? Was my residence fit for putting up a prince like you? I made you stay there because I could not find a suitable accommodation for you immediately. I arranged a house for you. The day I went there to get it cleaned and to furnish it with chairs and tables, you left my house and came here, for you did not know that all this was being done. But that's all right. After all, your *mausa* is also someone near and dear. Whatever may be his attitude to me, I look upon him as my dearest friend. Do you know why I came here today? Hm...hm. Is this a house where someone like you should stay? I have taken a beautiful three-storied house on rent for you and got it appointed properly. The floor of that house is covered with a carpet. Chairs, tables, almirahs and a cot have been set out on it. The house also lies very close to your school. You'll go and stay in that house. I have bought a buggy at second hand. But it looks sleek like a brand new one. You'll go all over the town riding it. I have consulted the almanac, which says the tenth day of the bright fortnight of this month is an auspicious day. On this day you will enter the house. Remain ready that day and ride the buggy. Two bullock carts will be sent to carry

your personal effects. Tell me, my dear boy, what do you say to all this?'

Naru baboo— I'll let you know after I have a talk with *mausa*.

Natabar— Of course, you must do so. He is your guardian, after all. How could you not consult him? I feel very glad when I hear you say this. You talk the way your father's son should. Well, well. I'll also have a talk with Dhaima. Would she ever refuse to do as I say? We are exchanging letters daily. She never does anything without consulting me. No, no. I'll go to meet her myself. Letters won't do. I haven't seen Chanda for a long time now. So I am feeling restless. My official duties may get neglected. That makes no matter. What is more important – the work that concerns you or government work? My trips to Naripur cost me as much as forty or fifty rupees. I pay this from my own pocket. I never take even one paise from the treasury of the estate. I realise that my sister's sons are mere boys. To me, the money that belongs to you is like poison, like food to be offered to a deity.' He looked about and continued, 'I don't like your going everywhere accompanied by that barber, Karuna. People in Cuttack strongly disapprove of this. What a shame. All this pains me a lot. I'll send you a good servant. You'll let him stay near you all the time and take him with you wherever you go.'

The *nazar* rose to his feet. He took out about fifty rupees from his pocket and placed the coins in a heap in front of Naru baboo, who asked, 'What is this for?'

The *nazar*— Take this, my child. This is your pocket money. You are the son of a king, a prince. You have to spend on so many things. From now on, you'll receive hundred rupees a month towards your pocket money. The zamindari had a lot of debts to clear. So I was not in a position to give you your pocket money earlier.'

Till now Naru baboo was listening to his uncle quietly, like a mouse. He now opened his mouth and said, 'But *mausa* meets all my expenses. What would I do with this money?'

The *nazar*— My child, this is not my father's money. This is your money and you'll spend it. Suppose suddenly an occasion arises when you have to spend ten rupees. Why should you lose your face by borrowing the money from your friends?

The *nazar* swiftly changed the subject and passed his hand over Naru baboo's head and his back with great affection. But, to Naru baboo, his caressing hand felt like a whip set with thorns.

The *nazar*— I'll go to Naripur today. Do you want to send any message to your mother and Dhaima? But is there any need for you to send a message? I have come and seen how you are getting on. So I could tell them everything they need to know about you. Do sit down, my dear. Work at your studies. Never waste your time unnecessarily. Give all your attention to your studies.' Saying this, the *nazar* left the place in a hurry. Karuna, a mischievous fellow, now emerged from his place of hiding. He and Naru baboo exchanged smiles.

The *nazar* got the sahib to grant him four days' leave and set off for Naripur in a palanquin. Twelve bearers took their turns to carry him. He arrived at the lion gate of the palace at Naripur before daybreak. He came out of the palanquin and strode into the palace. But he was stopped by two paiks who did guard duty at the palace gate. They demanded, 'Who are you? Stop. Don't go. No one is allowed to go inside.'

This took the *nazar* by surprise and he thought, 'What? I am the master of the place. I am the owner of the zamindari. How dare these two mere *paik*s, who survive on the land granted to them, stop me, of all persons? He ordered, 'Step aside and let me go into the palace.'

The *paik*s – Who cares for your orders? Stay where you are. Don't move.

The *nazar* had a very short temper and he lost it at the slightest provocation. Again, who would not lose his temper when a mere servant talked back rudely to him? Would you and I not do the same in a similar situation? The *paik*s, for their part, are sons of *khandayats* after all. They would die rather than yield. As to be expected, a heated altercation followed and went on for some time. The *nazar* now checked himself, thinking, 'What would people say if they see me quarrel with these lowly servants?' He seethed in rage, but smiled and said, 'I was only testing you, trying to find out if you were doing your job properly. I am pleased with you, very pleased. Go and inform Dhaima and Chandamani that we have come.'

Normally a powerful person would not utter his own name in front of servants in order to introduce himself. But the *nazar* did so and thought that, on hearing it mentioned, the *paik*s would salute him and step aside. But black takes no other hue. The *paik*s saluted him all right but did not let him through. They said, 'We are but ignorant servants who merely carry out orders. How could we recognize your highness? Do come in. Do come in. We'll send a message into the palace when the *padhiary* comes.'

The *paik*s asked the *nazar* to come in and make himself comfortable but where would he sit? He had to remain standing. The *paik*s found out that he was the *nazar*; even so they did not let him through. 'All right. I'll settle my accounts with you four months later. If I don't throw you and your families out of this area my name is not Natabart Das.' The *nazar* said to himself. The *paik*s, for their part, thought to themselves, 'This then is that evil star, Rahu, who devours everything? Alas, when would our provider, the young master return to the palace?'

It was late in the morning by the time the *padhiary* came and ushered the *nazar* into the palace. Having been insulted by two worthless *paik*s made the *nazar* seethe with rage. But he was an important person after all; so he restrained himself somehow. 'Patience is always rewarded. All right. Let me allow a few days to go by. Let me keep my feelings concealed,' he told himself. He called out 'Dhaima. Dhaima, my dear Chandamani' as he made his way towards the inner wing of the palace. Dhaima, whose heart overflowed with bitterness, thought, 'Strange. Nata's reverence for us seems excessive today.' Dhaima and Chandamani were seated on the veranda.

Dhaima— It is you, dear Nata. Come. When did you arrive?

The *nazar* pretended as if he could not make out what she said and bowed to her, touching her feet with both his hands. The moneybag, which he was carrying in his left hand, he set down noisily between the two. 'Oh Dhaima. What can I say? I have found time to breathe after long seven years. I give little time to my government job, and devote all my time to managing the affairs of the estate. Day and night this work keeps me occupied. There are days on which I find no time for taking meals at night. You had sent for me on a

number of occasions. But I could not find time even to wipe my nose. I thought to myself, "Dhaima will always be there. Nothing will go wrong if our meeting got delayed for a bit. What is more important is the work at hand." Oh God. When I set to work examining the accounts of the estate, I felt I was looking at a bundle of straw, not a bundle of records. It seemed as if these had been maintained by an assembly of thieves. (Up to this point Dhaima kept listening to the *nazar* quietly. But now a look of displeasure clouded her face.) I threw those thieves out. I did not want to do so, but what was more important: these fellows or the interests of my children? I replaced those thieves with record-keepers who were more reliable and more competent in keeping accounts. I looked at the records and found that the old record-keepers had collected taxes from the tenants but had not entered the amounts in the records. There were no receipts either. They must have given tenants receipts for taxes paid but these are not mentioned in the records.'

Dhaima could not contain herself any longer and remarked acidly, 'They must be very good record-keepers indeed.'

The *nazar*— That's exactly what I am telling you, Dhaima. I have preserved all the old records in bundles and I'll show them to you one by one. The mischief of the record-keepers have not only made the government incur losses, this has made our children suffer losses, too. I have not yet calculated exactly how much loss we have sustained. But I guess that the loss must amount to not less than fifteen to twenty thousand rupees. This amount could not be recovered for the deadline for the collection of the tax has passed.

Dhaima let out a heavy sigh and thought to herself, 'Alas. Have you really pocketed such a large amount, Nata? She then said, aloud, 'The late zamindar had shown me the records relating to payment of annual taxes for seven or eight years, one by one. He and I used to make arrangements for depositing the annual tax every year. How could so much money go undeposited?'

The *nazar*— You'll see for yourself, Dhaima. This is no hearsay. I'll convince you with the help of records and documents. There is another thing, of which you are not aware Dhaima. It is amazing how much money the late zamindar had borrowed from moneylenders. Every time he made a trip to Cuttack he would borrow

two to three thousand rupees signing hand-notes, not bothering to get the loan documents registered properly.

Dhaima began to lose her patience. She protested, 'No, Nata. This is not true. Whenever my son-in-law went to Cuttack I used to give him money from the palace treasury he would need to spend there. He had never told me of any loans he had taken. On returning home he would give me the details of his expenses. I maintained the accounts. I had never come across the mention of any debts.' One thing needs to be explained at this point. Dhaima took the responsibility of maintaining the accounts and operating the palace treasury in the hope that Chandamani would be able to learn how to keep accounts. This was also what the late zamindar had wanted. However, she had tried very hard to teach her unworthy student how to keep accounts, but in vain. Chandamani was quite intelligent. She was good at arithmetic and could work out mathematical sums. She also wrote a beautiful hand. But so what? To her money matters and accounts were something to be avoided, like plague. Dhaima and she spent time exchanging small talk or reading books together. But the moment Dhaima brought up the topic of accounts or money Chandamani would have an instant attack of headache. She would get up immediately and lie down on the bed or bolt the door of her room from inside and busy herself with drawing the figure of a cat or a dog. Dhaima, who perfectly understood her ways, would feel annoyed but go away smiling. She had tried to coax her student into learning how to keep accounts a number of times but had grown tired of the exercise. Her student made no progress in her studies at all. Had Natabar been aware of all this he would not have dared tell so many white lies.

Natabar— Believe me Dhaima. I have got twenty hand notes, which I have kept tied up with a red tape. The moneylenders have put their signatures on the back of these after receiving repayment. Everything has to be explained to the sahibs and you will also go through them. This, after all, is no child's play. The accounts will not be passed unless receipts and vouchers are produced.

The *nazar* saw that a number of maidservants were peering through the window and around the door. He now said, making sure that they heard him, 'Oh. The palace servants must be facing great

hardship since money could not be sent. But they will not suffer from now on. I'll send a thousand rupees every month for sundry expenses. The amount will reach you before the *sankranti* without fail.

Dhaima was feeling fed up. She cut him short, saying, 'My dear Nata. You must not have had your meal last night. Go and have a quick bath. I am sure you did not sleep well either. How could you sleep, after all? The palanquin bearers grunt and shout so much one never gets any sleep. You, the maid in charge of the storeroom, go and see to the comforts of the servants who have come with the *nazar*. Be quick. You *padhiary*. Go and get the babu oil and take him to the pond for a bath.

Chapter Fiftyfour

The *Nazar*'s Cutcherry

It was evening. The *nazar* held court in the outer courtyard of the temple of Lord Jugal Kishore. The barber kept replacing the *chillums*. The *nazar* sucked at the *hookah* noisily and sent out clouds of smoke. He now sat on the carpet, which had been spread in the palanquin, leaning against a large pillow. All the others sat on the ground. Where could sheets to seat them all be found? The *nazar* looked around. He saw no one except his own record-keepers and *paiks*. He had wanted to give his own trusted men some advice in private. So everything was going according to plan. The *nazar* whispered pieces of advice to all present, 'Act with extreme caution over the next few months. Make sure you don't upset or alienate the tenants.' Lest what he said might confuse or discourage his men, the *nazar* reassured them hinting that he would become the owner of the estate in a few days' time.

The *nazar* held court for two days. He had expected that old record-keepers, *maqaddams*, and village elders would come to pay their respects to him and that many tenants would throw themselves at his feet, supplicating and bring him *salami*. Two days passed, but no one came to the cutcherry, which remained filled with tobacco smoke. Life for everyone in the estate had become utterly miserable. Who would feel overwhelmed with devotion, come running to supplicate and drop a coin at the *nazar*'s feet as *salami*? Some stupid, thoughtless or ignorant fellow might still have come to the cutcherry, but Haribol Barik had toured the villages going from door to door dissuading everyone from meeting the *nazar*. Not content with this, he set all his personal work aside and kept a close watch on people who went to see the *nazar*.

The *nazar* also spent a lot of time talking to Dhaima about many other affairs relating to the estate. But he realised that she paid little attention to what he told her. Whenever he discussed a particular matter, she would change the subject and talk about some trivial things. If the *nazar* insisted on her paying attention to what he was saying, she would plead, 'I am but a woman. What do I know?'

The *nazar* spent two days in the palace. For some reason, nothing gave him any pleasure there any more. But Hope, the she-demon, kept whispering into his ears: Why worry? Work hard. You will become the owner of the estate.

Chapter Fiftysix
Good Friday

The cutcherry was closed for four days on account of Good Friday. Dowson sahib had gone to England on furlough for a year to leave his children there. So the *nazar* did not have to go to his residence in the morning these days. But there was some other work, which kept him occupied all the time. He kept consulting the moneylender Dheukal Bhagat. Day and night the two talked to each other in whispers in private.

Another work also kept the *nazar* busy: he was visiting all the moneylenders in Cuttack and making arrangements for borrowing money from them. He was taking care that one moneylender knew nothing about his transactions with another. He was planning to borrow from some without signing any papers. From others he planned to borrow by signing hand notes or registered deeds. He was saying to all of them, 'I don't need the money now. It will be needed four months later. All I want is that everything should be settled in advance.' A clever man always plans everything well in advance. All that now interested the *nazar* was money, nothing but money. Even when a paltry sum of two rupees came into his hands, he put it into the moneybox.

Many things needed at the cutcherry used to be procured from the shopkeepers in the bazaar on credit. The shopkeepers wrote out receipts and received payment later after bills were passed for payment. This arrangement was overseen by the *nazar*, and enabled him to make some money on the side. For a month and a half, the shopkeepers had not received any payment. When they made inquiries they received the same reply from the *nazar*: the bills have not been passed for payment. A few petty shopkeepers got fed up after making

several trips for collecting their dues. A few of them went to the cutcherry to make inquiries, but who would dare ask the *nazar*? He was a petty official all right, but he did work for the government. One would always need his help. How could then one afford to say a hard word to him? The *nazar* got angry with a few, who pressed him to make the payment. How strange. As the saying goes: lend money to a rich man and salute him day in and day out. Give things on credit and get scolded for your pains!

It was a Saturday. The cutcherry in the *nazar*'s own residence was very busy. Ten, twelve *piada*s were present there and warrants to be served were being distributed among them. This too was no straightforward transaction. Someone was given five warrants that would bring him some profit while another got only one that would bring him none. It was but natural that the one who had not got a 'good' warrant would feel annoyed. The *piada*s came out and talked among themselves. 'Brother. You got a "good" warrant because you paid half your earnings. Why should anyone bother about us?' But the *piada* who had got a good warrant also seemed vexed and said, 'I work day in and day out, thinking nothing of my safety or taking two proper meals a day. And this man, who sits at home doing nothing, would pocket half of what I earn. Fine, at least wait until I get paid my dues. No, he won't wait. You must give him his share in advance from your own pocket. This is what fate has decreed for us, my brother. What is there to say to anyone?'

Just at this moment four *piada*s arrived bringing the road cess collected from the *mofussil*. The *nazar* flew into a rage when he saw them. He exploded, 'Am I your father's servant that I would be toiling like this?' The *nazar* had a foul mouth and he said whatever came to his mind whenever he lost his temper. His eyes fell on Prabhudayal Bhagat, who stood before him, and he thought, 'The time has come when something could be done for this fellow. He is loyal and able and has been serving me for free. The money is still with Chitra. All I have to do is to throw one of these *piada*s out.'

The *nazar* took a good look at the faces of the *piada*s who had come from the *mofussil* and made up his mind about something. He then said to them, 'Bring the money.' The *piada*s poured the coins

they had collected before the *nazar*, who counted these and put them in one heap.

At last Khuda Bux's turn came. The *nazar* took one look at his face and started counting the coins. While he did so, Khuda Bux fixed his gaze on the *nazar*'s hands. He wondered, 'What kind of counting is this? The *nazar* picks up two or three one rupee coins and counts them as one rupee. He did not do so when he counted out the coins deposited by the other *piadas*.' Khuda Bux began to grow apprehensive, but he sat quietly, without opening his mouth. Having finished the counting, the *nazar* quickly mixed the coins with those brought in by other *piadas*. Only a one rupee coin and an eight anna coin lay before him. He now turned to Khuda Bux and said, 'Khuda Bux. How much money did you bring?'

Khuda Bux, 'One hundred twenty-one rupees and eight annas, Huzoor.'

The *nazar*— But I counted out a hundred rupees. One rupee and eight annas are lying in front of me. Where are the remaining twenty rupees?' Khuda Bux's heart began to pound. He pleaded, 'Please count the coins one more time, Huzoor.' This made the *nazar* furious. He said angrily, 'What? I count thousands of rupees daily and never make a mistake. You dare say I lost count of your twenty rupees? Do you think we have nothing to do except counting your money two hundred times?'

The more Khuda Bux wailed and pleaded, the angrier the *nazar* became. Khuda Bux made use of all the flattering expressions he could think of: Huzoor, my provider, *Dharma* incarnate, my father and mother, the saviour of the poor. But who would lend him ears? The *nazar* grew even more furious and said, 'You have misappropriated government funds. You will not only get dismissed; you will also go to jail. If you care for your own well-being, deposit twenty rupees. If you won't, I'll report the matter to the sahib, and leave the decision to him. Things will then get out of my hands.'

The astrologer Sadasiv Shanibigraha Khadiratne was sitting beside the *nazar* for the past half an hour. He had offered prayers for propitiating the nine planets .He was a simple-hearted person.

Unable to control himself, he said, 'Baboo. Today is Saturday. It is midday. Your planets are not occupying auspicious positions at the moment. Please don't continue with the business of the day.'

A time comes in people's lives when they find the words of even their well-wishers extremely unsavoury. The *nazar* flew into a rage and burst out, saying, 'You keep quiet. This is an official matter and has nothing to do with begging alms.'

The words humiliated the astrologer so deeply he felt he would die of shame. He was a reputed person and was associated with important people. What the *nazar* said cut him to the quick. Other people who were present there hung their heads in accute embarrassment.

The money collected amounted to five thousand rupees. The *nazar* put the coins into three cloth bags and tied their mouths with pieces of string. When he looked up, Prabhudayal, who was a clever fellow, came and stood beside him, folding his hands and saying, 'Huzoor, Huzoor'. On the *nazar*'s orders, he carried two bags under his arms and one in his right hand and followed his master. He lay down the bags in front of the *nazar*'s bedroom, rubbed his hands as if he was kneading a *roti* and came away quickly. At the time, Chitra was busy doing household chores outside. She slyly watched the Nazar putting the moneybags by. Normally she never did such a thing. Why was she watching everything so intently today?

Everyone had gone home. But Khuda Bux did not. He headed straight for Juma mosque. He washed his hands and feet and then facing west he offered prayers to the Lord, '*la illaha –illala – mahamad rasul illala.*'

By the time he finished offering his prayers, it was almost getting dark. He again washed his hands and feet and again offered his prayers to the Lord. Then he folded his hands and facing west said, 'O Allah. I follow the instructions of the holy *Koran* and offer prayers five times a day and fast regularly. I am absolutely innocent. If I don't get justice I'll lose faith in the *Holy Koran* and in the Lord and his messenger.'

It was not that Khuda Bux did not have faith in religion. He said all this to the Lord out of great anguish and pique. Khuda

Bux was a very simple-hearted person. He was a stranger to all manner of intrigues. His own problems always kept him occupied. He supported a family of five with great difficulty. But he never let this bother him too much. Whenever he found himself in deep trouble, he would sit down and offer up prayers to the Lord. The *nazar* did not dare choose his victim from among the other *piada*s for they were tough nuts. So he decided to ruin the poor *pathan* for he happened to be a simple soul. After all, a cat chooses to defecate where the soil is loose and soft.

Chapter Fiftyseven
A Bungalow is Purchased

There was a bungalow with a thatched roof, which stood on one side of the field that lay to the west of Tulsipur in Cuttack. This was one of the four or five bungalows, which belonged to Siusaran Bhagat, a moneylender, who lived in Buxibazaar in Cuttack. Few people visited this bungalow for it lay in a deserted corner of the town away from the cutcherry and the bazaar. It was also not fit for the residence of a proper white sahib. Now and then, when no other cheap accommodation was available in the town, some brown-complexioned sahibs chose to stay here. Even these would not stay here permanently. The owner, Bhagat, was a clever man: he calculated that the rent he received was much less than the expenses on keeping the bungalow in good repair and the taxes he had to pay for it. So, feeling thoroughly fed up, he said one day, 'Let this bungalow go to dogs. Who cares?' Since that day, the bungalow lay empty and unused and began slowly to fall into decay.

Prabhudayal Bhagat knew of this bungalow. One day, in the morning, the deserted bungalow began to bustle with activities. Some ten to fifteen labourers were hard at work. Day and night stray cows used to sleep on the verandah of the bungalow, which was littered with dried as well as fresh pats of cow dung. The labourers, baskets in hand, were busy removing these. Two labourers chased chemani birds from the ceiling with the help of a long bamboo stick to the top end of which was bound a bunch of date palm leaves. Harassed by them, a lot of chemanis had fled, flying from roof to roof. But a few shameless ones kept flying from one room to another, flapping their wings. A few doors and windows had fallen off and were lying on the floor. A carpenter was busy standing them up. Prabhudayal said, 'Carpenter. Why are you wasting your time trying to use screws?

Just drive a few nails with your hammer. All I want is that the doors should remain standing. Mason. Listen to me. Plaster only the middle room properly and put some plaster on the front doorway. Just wipe the rest of the house with a wet mop.'

At this time a cart loaded with pots bearing croton plants and rose bushes arrived. Prabhudayal arranged all these on the front verandah. 'Two labourers should go to the kitchen and clean it up', he said. By evening all work was finished. The house was decked up. In the middle room, a tattered sheet was spread out. A broken chandelier and a few glass domes were hung from the ceiling. Prabhudayal warned everyone, saying, 'Take care. Everything has been got on rent. If anything gets broken or damaged, we will have to pay for it.' Four chairs and a table had been set out on the sheet. A kerosene lamp stood on the table. Prabhudayal called Sheik Rahim Bux, the cook and said, 'You see. That donkey does not understand anything. But lest he might find out, put these threads across your shoulder. If he asks you your name tell him it is Ram Panda. Prepare only meat stew and *palau*. You Apud (a Telugu boy belonging to the washerman caste) — take some money and buy drinks, some sweets, *puri*s and *kachurie*s. Bring two kinds of drinks: foreign brandy and a bottle of distilled country liquor. Get cannabis worth four annas. You Kadu (Kadar Khan was a butcher) go and call everyone. I am hard-pressed for time. All must come wearing nice dresses. If you don't have nice clothes, get these from a washerman on rent. You labourers. Go home. You won't get your wages today. Don't complain. All right. You will get *bakshis*. I'll tell my master to give you wages for a day and a half. The currency notes have not been made into loose change. Where can I get loose change in this wilderness?'

In the evening, the two friends arrived riding a battered motorcar. Everyone at the bungalow stood up promptly and saluted them and occupied their appointed seats. Two chairs meant for the two friends had been placed side by side. Raghab Mohanty settled into one and looked up at the lights overhead, wonderstruck. One, two, three, four, five— no, as many as ten lights burned in one room. The place seemed lit up by daylight. The chandelier fascinated Raghab. 'What kind of lamp is this? It burns so brightly.' He kept gaping at the nautch girls. What gorgeous clothes have they put on? Are these

made of gold and silver? My sister is a queen. But she does not wear clothes like these. These women must be more famous than my sister. Then he looked down and saw that he himself was sitting, wearing shoes, on a mattress laid out on a carpet. He took another look at his own finely dressed self. He now thought to himself that if his sister was a queen, he too had become a big shot. The thought thrilled him. In the mean time, Prabhudayal had made him drink two glasses of foreign brandy. He guzzled the red liquid, closed his eyes, opened his mouth and looked up, baring his teeth, and let out a loud sigh. People present there looked away and smiled. The passage leading from Raghab's throat to his stomach began to burn. To him it now seemed as if the lights shone ten times more brightly than before. He grew oblivious of everything around him, including himself. He felt that the world was full of light and bliss. He thought he was now seated on a throne in heaven and tasting nectar. He had heard in a song that in heaven celestial dancers performed dances. Are these celestial dancers, he wondered. At this time, Prabhudayal poured half a bottle of lavender on his head, which soaked his whole body and dripped onto his feet. The fragrance filled the whole room. Raghab felt enchanted by the smell. Just as an ox dilated its nostrils to smell something, he pressed a piece of lavender-soaked cloth and went on smelling it hard. At this very moment, the musicians started playing on the violin and the tabla. The two nautch girls danced for a long time— now standing together in one place, now stepping back together, one dancing in front of another, snapping fingers, baring their teeth and making faces, and jangling their anklets. When they stopped, Raghab commanded, 'Go on dancing. Go on.' Again the nautch girls whirled, opened their mouths, bared their teeth, shook their heads like mad women and kept dancing. After this, they started singing a song which went like this: an-an- an—in—in –in—un—un—un—an. *Sayanre bayan...ther kaise chhodu jan ...meri kaise gujar gujran.*

Raghab said, 'Sing a song. Sing a song.' This made the nautch girls and the instrumentalists look at each other in utter confusion. Aren't they singing a song? But Prabhudayal Bhagat, who was a man of superior understanding, ordered them, saying, 'Sing an Oriya *choupadi*.' The musical instruments came alive once more and a song

was sung:

The ocean of my happiness has flowed away my dear, how can I bid you farewell

The star burns more brightly than lamps made of gold

The wine brought from heaven tastes sweeter than the nectar of song

What does someone who has not spent day and night enjoying himself know about the three worlds?

The beauty of the celestial dancers as they dance spreads like a flash of lightning.

In an adjoining room, food served in porcelain dishes was laid out on a broken table. Prabhudayal Bhagat very courteously ushered his friend into this room. No one among the ancestors of Raghab must have even heard of *palau*. A plate of mutton curry and plates containing *puri*s and *chena badas* had been placed alongside *palau*. Alcohol had made Raghab's belly burn. The dishes tasted sweet and delicious like nectar brought from heaven. He tasted every dish laid before him and had a hard time of deciding which dish to help himself to first. In the end he mixed all the dishes together and, like a dog, devoured a huge quantity of food that would have filled an earthen pot. While he ate, Prabhudayal kept handing him glasses of drink. When at last Raghab finished eating and came and sat in his chair a feeling of immense well-being came over him. He also felt greatly energised. Singing and dancing went on. Someone shouted, 'Wonderful, excellent. Bravo, bravo.' All present there were gloriously drunk. When one jackal sets up a howl, a herd of jackals promptly follow suit. Just like them, everyone in the bungalow started screaming, 'Wonderful. Bravo.' How could Raghab restrain himself now? He too joined them, shouting, 'Wa.Wa.Ba. Ba. Ba. Ba.' His funny way of rendering compliments made everyone burst into laughter. Raghab's laughter was louder than the neighing of a horse. Unable to contain himself, he sprang to his feet and started dancing. Others joined him. His clothes slipped off his body. Embarrassed, the nautch girls hastily fled. The mad screams and the wild dance of the revellers made the house quake. Had the house stood in the middle of the town, people would have thought that it had caught fire and gathered in front of it in very large numbers. As he danced away,

Raghab vomited profusely and fell down unconscious. Apudu and another man threw up on Raghab and collapsed on him. The house became extremely quiet and stank horribly. It resembled a trough in hell where a few ghosts were wrestling with each other.

However, Prabhudayal remained in full possession of his faculties. He had no problem holding his drink. Since he drank every day, drinking had become a matter of habit with him. He could take five different kinds of drinks and would still have no difficulty walking straight. As the saying goes, a friend in need is a friend in deed. Who else would come to Raghab's rescue, if he would not? All the others lay unconscious, under the influence of drink. Raghab's well-wisher, Prabhudayal pulled his friend out of that cesspool of vomit, like one drags a dead body, and made him lie down on a broken-down four-poster.

It was eight in the morning. No one from the town ever came to this area. Only a few cowherds now tended herds of cattle there. A couple of grass-cutters had begun cutting grass with their tools a short distance away from the bungalow. No one would be willing either to describe or to read about what was happening inside it at that moment. Prabhudayal sent for a sweeper and got the house cleaned up and washed quickly. Now he must wake Raghab up. A sheet had been thrown over his body. Swarms of flies had settled on his face. Prabhudayal called, 'Friend. Wake up.' After he did so for a long time he received only 'Hun' for an answer. This was followed by the sound of snoring. It was no ordinary snore. One got the impression that an old bear was being convulsed with fever during midday. Prabhudayal realised that words would not awaken him. So he dragged him and made him sit up. Raghab was awake now. He looked around. His head reeled and seemed heavy. He did not at all feel like getting up. He felt very drowsy and felt like throwing up. Prabhudayal was a man of wide experience. He made out that it was the effect of a hangover. He motioned to Apudu, who brought a bowl of til oil and rubbed Raghab's head and body with it. The massage gave great comfort to Raghab. He narrowed his eyes and kept shutting and opening them. There was a pond with stone embankments in the premises of the bungalow. Prabhudayal managed with great difficulty to carry Raghab to its bathing *ghat*. After Apudu poured water from

a tumbler three or four times on his head, Raghab waded into the pond and took a proper bath. When Prabhudayal handed him a glass of something to drink, Raghab got rid of the hangover in no time at all.

He now felt terribly hungry, and helped himself to all the dry *puris*, stale mutton curry and *palau* left over from the night before. He washed all these down with water that would have filled a pitcher. Now he felt elated. Apudu placed two chairs on the verandah. Seated in these the two friends exchanged small talks. *Paans* full of the choicest spices lay in front of them. Raghab chewed these like a goat chewing leaves. Apudu put tobacco in a *hookah* and set it before them. The two friends passed the pipe to each other and took turns to smoke the *hookahs*. Raghab had already got into the habit of smoking *hookahs*.

He said, 'Let me tell you my friend, the tobacco my brother-in-law smokes is not as fragrant as this.'

Prabhudayal— Ha ha ha. Many baboos in Cuttack smoke tobacco. Tell me, which of those wretched baboos will find tobacco of this quality. We have a big warehouse in Calcutta. I have got it sent in a parcel from there.

Raghab—Are there large buildings like this and baboos in Calcutta?

Prabhudayal— Of course. You would find many baboos like yourself there. They enjoy life to the full. There are many large buildings in Calcutta. Wait, wait. I'll take you there. You will see for yourself how people have fun in Calcutta. There are a lot of nautch girls there, too.

The village where Raghab came from was full of houses with thatched roofs. He had never set his eyes on a pucca house before coming to Cuttack. After arriving in Cuttack he had come across many big and tall buildings. And yet he had never before imagined that the interior of a house could be so beautifully decked up and that lights could be suspended from the ceiling. He knew that people slept on bedsheets. But here he found that chairs had been placed on bedsheets and people wearing shoes sat on them. 'How exciting! How fortunate these baboos are. I have become a baboo myself. How I wish Makra, Sankra, Ugra, and Gurubaria, who tended cattle with

me, could come and see me now,' Raghab thought to himself. He asked Prabhudayal, 'Dear friend, whose pucca house is this?'

Prabhudayal – This belongs to a friend of mine. He owns a number of houses. He said to me that he wanted to sell this house off. I suggest, my friend, that you purchase this house. This is a quiet place. We could have a good time here every day without anyone's knowledge.

Raghab took a good look at the house, its premises and the pond. 'Oh, what a large compound and the pond has a pucca bathing *ghat*! This looks like the palace of Lord Indra. We will come to own this house if we are lucky,' he thought. In the mean time Apudu had handed him two glasses of liquor in quick succession. Raghab began feeling as if he already owned the house. He asked, 'How much would this house cost?'

Prabhudayal— Not less than twenty thousand rupees. But I'll help you get his for much less.

Raghab— Oh god. Where would I find so much money?

Prabhudayal— Ho, ho. How can someone like you want for money? Your sister is a queen. I'll arrange the money. You need not worry.

Raghab was now all eagerness. He said to Prabhudayal imperiously, 'Yes, We'll buy this house. You buy it today.'

Raghab found it hard to control himself any longer. He was convinced that this big pucca house had already come into his possession. 'Ho ho ho. We'll have a wonderful time here. Fear of that scoundrel, my brother-in-law, has made life miserable for me. Things will now change. This place is very quiet. No one can find out what goes on here,' he thought. Then he said aloud, 'Call the owner of the house, my friend. Let him sell the house to us. Don't you waste a single moment. What song was that nautch girl was singing yesterday? "Aan—aan – hun—huun. How did she die?'

Prabhudayal— No, no my friend. Let's go home. Your sister must be looking for you. We'll buy the house tomorrow.

Raghab— No, no, no. I don't care for any one. I have told my mother and my sister knows that I have gone to Tulsipur to watch a *badipala*. I may spend two days, may be four days or even six days. Why should any scoundrel look for me? "Aan –aan—uun—uun how she is

dying?" He now started singing in a very loud voice.

Prabhudayal, a very shrewd fellow, figured everything out. He thought that this was an opportune moment. He called Apudu aside and whispered a lot of words of advice to him. He placed particular emphasis on one piece of advice: get nice dresses from a washerman on rent.

History tells us that obtaining the *sanad* for the *dewani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from the emperor of India, had taken East India Company as much time as was needed to buy and sell a donkey. But transactions relating to the buying and selling of the bungalow took as much as five to six hours, inspite of attempts to finish them quickly.

It was four in the afternoon. The owner of the bungalow and a lawyer, pen and inkpot in hand, arrived. The owner and the lawyer were dressed alike: very long *chapkans*, which reached down to their heels, the loose sleeves of which hung out and covered their fingers. The owner put on a turban made by winding a five-yard long *dhoti* and the lawyer wore a dirty wornout pith hat. Their bodies exuded a strong smell of perfume. If Raghab had been in his senses he would surely have recognized the visitors: the lawyer was none other than the cook Khuda Bux and the owner was the pimp who was playing on the tabla last night. Raghab was very pleased to see them. They all heartily embraced each other. The *majlis* began. Apudu was at hand, with a bottle of drink and glasses.

The matter of the sale of bungalow came to be discussed. The price was haggled over. Prabhudayal drove a hard bargain, brought the price down, fighting hard for his friend's interests. It took hours of negotiations before the price was settled. The sum and substance of these negotiations are as follows:

Babu Ram Ram Bhagat— he was none other than the cook Khuda Bux— a moneylender from Bengal, at first asked for twenty thousand rupees for the bungalow. But in view of the fact that Raghab baboo and his friends wanted to have a good time in the place, the price was lowered to five thousand rupees. Raghab was extremely delighted for he had got something worth twenty thousand rupees for only five thousand rupees. He patted his friend on the back, 'Well done my friend. Well done. Finish the job quickly.' The lawyer wrote

out the sale deed. While doing so, a gust of wind lifted a part of his *chapkan*. One could see that he was wearing an eight-yard long torn and shabby *dhoti*, and there were no shoes on his feet. Since the *chapkan* hung very low no one could notice this. The lawyer quickly drew the *chapkan* over his feet. After the sale deed was written out, Prabhudayal said, 'This matter involves so much money. So the sale deed has to be registered.' The lawyer promptly went out to get the document registered. As Raghab could not bear to wait he commanded the lawyer, 'Come back as quickly as you can.' The lawyer returned an hour later from the registrar's office and handed the deed to Raghb baboo, who turned it over three times, looked it over and felt overjoyed. He was convinced that everything had been done properly. In his village Ram Paida had once sold a plot measuring two acres to Shyam Panda. At that time things in red ink had been written on printed paper like this, which had also borne a similar stamp. He looked at Prabhudayal's face, and pleasure lit up his face. The expression on his face seemed to convey this: My friend is a very clever man. He has done a good job, that is, he has made sure the deed is written out properly. The owner of the bungalow, Babu Ram Ram Bhagat now asked for payment. He needed money badly today. Even if Raghab could not pay the whole amount he should pay at least three thousand rupees. Raghab looked at his friend's face. Prabhudayal promptly came to his rescue, saying, 'Don't worry about money. My friend will throw the money at you tomorrow. It is a matter of only five thousand rupees, after all. All right, if he can't arrange the money, I'll borrow five thousand rupees and pay you.' The buggy was ready. The two friends returned home riding it.

Chapter Fiftyeight
The Festival of Good Friday

The cutcherry was closed. The *nazar* was at home all day. The whole day he had been busy counting money. He went out for a stroll, his index finger jutting out of his prayer bag, just before it got dark and clay lamps were lighted to worship the goddess of the evening. Prabhudayal followed him. He was with Raghab when the *nazar* was in the innner wing of the house. No one could say if anything had passed between the two, for nothing was audible from outside. When the *nazar* came out of the house, Prabhudayal met him at the gate and said, "Huzoor, my maternal aunt is seriously ill. She may die any moment now. A messenger has come to take me to her. I'll run to Tulsipur and return here immediately. I won't take more than three, four hours.'

The *nazar* said, 'All right. But remember. You have to come back before eleven.' He then looked cautiously about him and added, 'At eleven you will be there. It'll be quite late by the time we come back. Don't forget to take a hurricane lamp with you.'

Prabhudayal— I'll do as you say Huzoor.

The *nazar*'s wife and her mother were busy chatting inside the house. Chitra was gently massaging Mangala Dei's back. All household chores had been finished and they had nothing at all to do. Chitra said, 'Tonight the Good Friday festival will be celebrated at the sahib's residence. No one will do any work today; they will only sit at home doing nothing. Lots of delicacies will be prepared in the temple. The master has left instruction that no cooking will be done at home tonight.'

Mangal Dei—I wish my son-in-law had taken dear Raghu with him to the temple. The boy would have tasted a few delicacies.

Chitra— I pleaded with our brother for a long time, but he refused to go to the temple. He has a stomachache. So he will not eat anything tonight. He is now lying in bed.

On hearing this Mangala Dei got alarmed and rose to her feet. She said, 'Is that so dear Chitri? Raghu is lying in bed? Let's go and see how he is doing.'

Chitra— No, no. He suffered from stomachache in the evening. He feels all right now. In fact he is running around outside.

Mangala Dei used to take nothing but a little rice water at night. What more could an old woman eat? As for Bishakha Dei, she liked to have stale soaked rice mixed with sour curd, and chillis and onion. The mother and daughter ate from the same bowl.

Chitra — There would be a festival at the sahib's house tonight to celebrate the Good Friday. Everyone in the bazaar feels very excited about it. For the last four days no baboo has gone to his office. Crackers will shoot up into the sky when the firework dispaly will be held at the sahib's residence.

Bishakha Dei— Do you know, mother? Firework dispalys in Cuttack are really spectacular. They make the earth shake. I get startled and feel scared.

Mangala Dei - I wish I could watch the fireworks. Will they be visible from the gates of our house?

Chitra— No, no. It won't be visible from here. The rockets will fly into the air. We'll be able to see them from the rooftop.

Mangala Dei – Let us then go there, watch the display and have a chat.

Chitra— No, no. You are an old woman. Why would you go and sit on the rooftop? The air is damp with night dew. But women in Cuttack do not care for the damp air. Women, young and old, married and unmarried, assemble on the terrace to watch the fireworks.

Mangala Dei— No, Chitra. Let us go to the terrace. We'll sit there and chat.

'All right, then,' said Chitra and walked ahead of them, a reed-mat under her arm. The three of them sat togethr in one place. The mother and her daughter fixed their gaze on the sky, saying, 'The display will begin now,' to each other. But Chitra kept fidgeting and

could not concentrate on what was being said, and kept furtively looking about her. On the pretext of spitting, she came to the edge of the roof thrice and looked down. An hour later, the sound of something falling with a thud came from the inner courtyard. The *nazar*'s wife exclaimed, 'Oh, that godforsaken cat must have overturned the pot.' Chitra rushed to the edge of the roof and looked down and said, 'No, my mistress. There is no one here.' A moment later she said, 'I have looked all around. I see no one on the terraces of the baboos. May be they have all gone downstairs. Won't there be any fireworks tonight? Now I remember that someone in the bazaar had told me earlier that there will be fireworks in the small hours. Please go downstairs. Let me run to the bazaar and find out when the display will be held. I'll be back in no time.' They all went downstairs.

Chapter Fifty-nine
The Wages of Sin

It was Tuesday. The cutcherry had reopened after four days. Lots of work had therefore piled up. The employees were present at the cutcherry, bundles of paper in hand. The sahib had not arrived yet. The *peshkar* was busy numbering several records and arranging them on the sahib's table. As soon as the clock struck twelve, the magistrate arrived. All the employees and litigants bowed their heads and saluted him. A few employees tried to press towards the sahib's table before others could reach there so that they could get their papers signed by him and start the day's work.

At this time a *chaprassi* bought the mail from the post office and placed it on the sahib's table. The sahib first read the letters that had come from England and put them on one side. Then he put all official letters on one side and read them one by one, tearing the envelopes open. The sahibs, as a matter of habit, first read official letters before reading any other letter. One of the official letters made the sahib explode. He angrily ordered, '*Chaprassi*. Go and bring that *khajanchi* here immediately.'

The tone in which the order was given made the employees panic. Putting aside thoughts of getting their papers signed, they beat a slow retreat. It would take the sahib at least half an hour to go through the mail. There would be no point in standing there doing nothing. So they all went back to their own tables.

The official letter in question was a third reminder. There was an instruction that a sum of eighty thousand rupees should be sent from the Cuttack treasury to the treasury in Calcutta. This instruction had not been carried out yet. Mr. Dawson, the Collector, was in England on leave. Mr Jones was officiating as Collector. If he acted

promptly he would please his higher authorities. The sahib was keen to get ahead in his career. But what was this? There had been so much delay in implementing a government order and the matter had called for a third reminder! This, unmistakably, was a serious lapse. As soon as the *khajanchi* saluted him and stood before him, he demanded imperiously, 'Why has the money not been sent to Calcutta yet?'

Khajanchi— The money could not be sent because we did not have moneybags. Supplying moneybags is the job of the *nazar*.

The sahib— Call that rascal, the *nazar*.

The *chaprassi* informed him that the Nazar had not come to the cutcherry yet.

The sahib turned to the *peshkar* and asked, 'Why hasn't the *nazar* turned up yet?'

The sahib's anger frightened the *peshkar* and he hastened to say, 'It is not yet time for the *nazar* to come to the cutcherry.'(He did not say this out of spite for the *nazar*. However, what he said was the truth: For the last two months the *nazar* had taken little interest in office work. Some other work kept him so occupied that he found little leisure. Someone heard him say to Bishakha Dei and a near relation that he had to manange somehow for a few months. After that he would give up his job. In fact, he would soon need to employ a few *nazar*s. This author has not heard this himself. But he has to believe this on seeing how indifferent the *nazar* had become to his official responsibilities.)

The sahib roared, 'What? He does so because Dawson sahib is on leave? Send two *chaprassis* immediately and ask them to bring that rascal here, dragging him by his ear.'

As for the *nazar*, he had taken refreshments, dressed himself and got ready to go the cutcherry before ten in the morning. He had in his custody a lot of money belonging to the government. He had to write out *challan*s and deposit this in the treasury. He sent for two *piadas*, who would carry the moneybags to the cutcherry, and got them to stand before the front door. He went into the room, took out the keys from the fold of the cloth around his waist and opened the chest. He lifted the lid of the chest with his left hand and looked inside. What he saw made his heart race and rendered him speechless.

He looked into the chest again and again. It was empty. He felt the bottom of the chest with his right hand and screamed in terror, 'Oh, where has the money gone?' Bishakha Dei came rushing in. She did not know what had happened, but she trembled like a coconut leaf and kept moistening her fat lips with her tongue. Completely at a loss, Mangala Dei stood petrified. Chitra wept bitterly, closing her eyes again and again, saying, 'Oh mother, oh my father. What a terrible thing has happened? This is no family matter. This concerns the government.' She sank to her feet and went on sobbing. The chest had been locked.How could the money disappear?No one had broken it open or forced the door. Did the money in the chest melt away?

The *nazar* asked, 'Did anyone come into the room during the day or at night yesterday?'

Chitra promptly replied, 'From evening till the first watch at night we sat in front of this room. We did not leave this place. No one had stepped into the inner courtyard.'

Bishakha Dei was too scared to say that they had gone to the rooftop. The mother and her daughter simply supported what Chitra had said. Everyone was present. But where was Raghab? Mangala Dei was standing quietly till now. But when everyone looked for Raghab she began trembling. She stammmerd, 'He was sitting here since morning. I gave him a little oil. He rubbed it on his body and went to the river to take a bath.' Two or three *piadas* now ran out and searched for him at all the bathing *ghats* of river Katjuri. They looked at the faces of all who were bathing in the river. But Baboo Raghab Mohanty was not among them.

The *nazar* turned deathly pale. He was bathed in seat. He wondered if he should go and inform the police. At this moment, two chaprassis, breathless from running, arrived at his door. They shouted, '*Nazar* babu. Come quickly. Come out of your house quickly. This is the sahib's order. You must come.' Everything— looking for the money, searching for Raghab— came to a stop. The *nazar* rushed to the cutcherry. The *chaprassis* followed him, shouting, 'Baboo, faster, faster.'

The *nazar* saluted the sahib, stood in front of him and shivered like a billy goat, which finds its neck on the chopping block.

The sahib asked, 'What's the matter?'

The *nazar* replied, with great difficulty, 'Huzoor. I had kept five thousand rupees belonging to the government in my house. Someone has stolen it last night.'

The sahib exploded, 'What? Five thousand rupees belonging to the government has been misappropriated?'

He repeated this question a couple of times but received no reply. He said, 'Chaprassi. I would like the Superintendent of Police sahib to see me.' Saying this he went into his chamber.

There the two sahibs conferred till the afternoon. How could anyone find out what passed between the two? A *chaprassi* stood in front of the chamber. The cutcherry employees were forbidden to enter it. Around three, the Superintendent of Police called the court inspector and said, 'Keep the *nazar* under watch. Make sure he does not leave the cutcherry.'

The cutcherry was a very big place. Thousands of people had thronged it up. But everyone was absolutely quiet, like the sky before a violent storm broke. The employees could not take any interest in their office work; they merely occupied their seats and, heads lowered, mechanically turned over pieces of paper. The *muktar*s gathered under the banyan tree in front of the cutcherry and taked in whispers to each other. Three lawyers wearing large turbans paced up and down the verandah of the cutcherry gravely. They had no worries since they had collected their fees from their clients for the day. The clients beat their chests in despair, saying, 'Alas. The lawyers won't come to the cutcherry unless they are paid again tomorrow. We have now no money to give them. What is to be done?'

It was late in the afternoon. The sahib came into the courtroom and took his seat. He wrote out his order, which filled a page of fullscap paper. 'Send *nazar* Natabar Das to jail,' he ordered. A sub-inspector accompanied by four constables stood waiting. As soon as the sahib gave out the order, they handcuffed the *nazar*. Thousands of pairs of eyes stared at him as he was led away to the jail. But what a pity! Not even one pair of eyes became moist out of sympathy for such a respectable person coming to such grief. We concede that the *nazar* was a wicked person, one who harmed other people. But had he done harm to everyone? Let me explain. Suppose a thief has been

caught in a village. All the villagers rush out, shouting, 'Thrash the bastard.' But the thief has certainly not stolen from everyone's house in the village. But the point is he would steal from their houses if he got an opportunity to do so. The *piadas* were asked to give statements regarding the amount of money they had deposited with the *nazar*. Khuda Bux came out after making his statement. He looked up, raised his arms and prayed, 'Allah ho Akbar. I had said that the *Koran* sharif was false. I had committed a terrible mistake.'

It was long past evening. But the wicks had not yet been lighted at the *nazar*'s residence. The two women had grown tired, crying. There was no one around to comfort them except Chitrakala, a friend of those in distress. She consoled them, saying, 'Don't worry. The master will come back.' She got some refreshments from the bazaar, fed them and made them drink a tumblerful of water each. When she felt a little better, Mangala Dei held Chitrakala's hand and asked, 'Chitri, my dear. Two *chaprassis* of the sahib came and took my son-in-law away. They are now looking for Ragho. My dear Chitri. Please convince the sahib's men that Ragho is a very good boy. He never makes any mischief. He knows nothing at all. He was by my side all day long. He has run away because he is too scared. Uun—uun—uun. Where is my boy lying now? He has not eaten anything. Please go and give her some powdered puffed rice. He is your little brother. Save him. I had told him, "My dear Ragho. We should not go and live with a relative. We should live in our own house surviving on whatever little we had. But he was an obstinate boy and would not listen to me. My dear Chitri. I leave your younger brother in your care."' The old woman held Chitra so tight that she was nearly suffocated. She comforted Mangala Dei, saying,

'Mother, don't worry at all. Our brother will not come to any harm. What has he done, after all?'

Mangal Dei, 'That is exactly what I want to say. May gods shower nectar on your lips. May your husband live forever. May you wear a vermillion mark on your head even after your hair goes grey.'

Chapter Sixty
The Police Raid

It was early dawn. Most of the shops in the bazaar were yet to open. Here and there only a few shopkeepers had opened their shops, dusted their wares and were sprinkling holy water on them. One shopkeeper swept the space in front of his shop clean and burnt the essence of guggal plant in two potshards. The smoke filled the air with fragrance. An old man mumbled the name of the Lord, while sweeping the verandah of his shop with a broomstick. A sahib came riding a horse, the sword tied to his waist beating against the side of the horse and producing a metallic noise. A number of constables wearing red turbans and carrying sticks ran before and after him, their shocs clicking. About fifteen *chowkidars*, a long bamboo staff in hand and wearing multicoloured turbans and waistbands followed them. A few people standing on either side of the road watched them, wonder-struck. The sahib's party issued from the police station and proceeded straight to the *nazar*'s residence and surrounded it. Before they got there, a *daroga* accompanied by a few constables was guarding the place in the small hours. Word was now sent into the house, 'The women should move aside. A search will be conducted.'

When the message reached the two women in the house, they fainted away out of fear. Chitra made them sit up somehow. She was a woman all right, but she was nevertheless quite able to face any crisis. Her courage easily exceeded even that possessed by two men. She said, 'A lot of constables sent by the sahib have arrived. They will carry off all that is there in the house. Alas, alas. They will also take your jewellery away. Put them on. You can save these if you do so. Or else these will be gone.' The police had once raided Chitra's house. At that time they had not laid their hands on the ornaments

she was wearing. She knew that the police never seized ornaments worn by a woman during a raid.

The *nazar*'s wife gaped like an idiot, unble to make things out. Chitra realised that time was running out. Outside, the daroga kept shouting, 'Women, step aside.' Chitra, a clever woman, quickly took out the bunch of keys tied to the silver chain round her mistress's waist and opened the jewellery box. This was no time to decide whether she should be trusted or not. Again, how could the *nazar*'s wife fail to trust Chitra at a moment like this? No friend in the whole world now seemed more worthy of trust than Chitra. She made her mistress put on the ornaments like an image-maker decked up an image. She was in too great a hurry to worry if the right ornament adorned the right part of the body. In her confusion she slipped the ring meant for the finger on her mistress's toe, and put an anklet on her mistress's finger.

Angered by the delay the *daroga* started kicking the door with his iron-shod shoes. The women withdrew into the backyard. The *daroga* got into the house and started seizing the household assets and preparing a list. The sahib left after giving instructions. It got dark by the time all the assets were seized and sent to the police station in a bullock cart. The women lay in the backyard. No one had any time for them. They had not eaten anything at all. How could Chitra take anything when her mistress had not eaten? She had left them a couple of times only to check if her own house had been properly locked. She, too, was terribly hungry like her mistress. There was great commotion in Cuttack today. Her master's house had not been spared. How could she then not worry about the safety of her own house?

After the *nazar*'s assets were seized and conveyed to the police station, investigation into the theft began. No clue regarding the money stolen could be found. This was an extraordinary case of theft. Even the daroga seemed to be at his wits' end. He said he had never ever investigated a case of theft like this; he had not even heard of such a case. He asked, 'Well. Who live in this house?' Someone gave the names and mentioned Raghabanand Mohanty. Where was he? Every other work was set aside. A search was mounted for Raghab Mohanty. But no one could find him during the night. The

constables had eaten nothing during the day. They all went home to eat. The three women lying in the backyard now came back into the house. The house was dark and empty. Alas! Alas! They could not find a tattered reed mat that they could roll out and sleep on. The *nazar*'s wife and her mother were extremely weak from hunger. They crashed on the floor, their mouths open. But Chitra's resourcefulness was equal to the crisis. She ran to the bazaar, bought a quantity of puffed and sugared rice, and made the two women eat it.They looked around for a glass to drink water from, but they did not find one. So they drank water with their cupped hands. Mangala Dei pressed Chitra to have a handful of puffed rice. But Chitra protested, snivelling, 'My mistress. How could the thought of eating even cross my mind when I find you in such a miserable state? I wish I had dropped dead at this very moment.' She quickly wiped her eyes after this and said, 'My mistress. I am suddenly reminded of one thing. You have seen what mischief these fire-eating thieves could make. If they see these ornaments on your body, do you think they will spare you? There are no men in the house. The thieves will come at night and slit your throat and take the ornaments away. Take these off. We'll hide these away somewhere tonight. When the day breaks you will put these on again. When the thief comes at night, he will take one look and go away thinking that the police had taken everything away.'

All this while the *nazar*'s wife listened to Chitra, gaping. Now, feeling very scared, she held Chitra tight. Without wasting a word, Chitra removed all the ornaments, and covering them with a piece of rag, made a bundle, which she handed to her mistress.

The *nazar*'s wife—Where will I keep this? We don't have a box or a chest in the house. You put it away somewhere.

Chitra— Oh God. I can't bring myself to touch so many ornaments. My heart bursts with grief. Plese put these away somewhere yourself.

The *nazar*'s wife looked around. Her eyes fell on a heap of rubbish in one corner of the house. She hid the bundle in it. She then turned to Chitra and said, 'Please sleep by my side. I feel very scared.'

Chitra – I will stay awake and keep a watch, for thieves are abroad. You go to sleep.

A moment later one heard the mother and her daughter snoring away.

Chapter Sixty-one

Seizure of the Stolen Money

Very early in the morning the *daroga* arrived at the *nazar*'s residence leading a party of ten constables and ten *chowkidars*. Nothing interested them except the answer to the question, 'Where is Raghab Mohanty?' The constables and *chowkidars* fanned out in all directions. Around nine in the morning information that the accused lay in a dilapidated bungalow in Tulsipur came. The police now ran in that direction, their shoes clicking. The informer led them to the door of the bungalow. The doors stood wide open. Bedsheets, pillows and other items used during the revels of the night lay scattered all over the house. The house seemed empty. A young cowherd was tending cattle near the premises of the bungalow. There were four men around. But they all ran away when they saw the police approach. A naked man, who looked like a black ghost, lay snoring loudly. The floor of the house was littered with bottles, burnt cannabis, tobacco ash and pots in which *palau* and mutton curry had been cooked. The *daroga*, a clever man, quickly figured out that a grand party had been held there the night before. Attempts were made to wake the man up, but he did not respond at all. A constable called Sheik Kadar, landed a couple of blows on the man but he still did not stir. Another two blows made the man stammmer out, 'My dear friend. Bring more drinks. Sing a song. Sing.' His words made everyone burst out laughing. The *daroga* said, 'Take him to the bathing *ghat* of the pond.' Four *pana chowkidar*s grabbed his legs and arms and one *chowkidar* held his head and they carried him as if he was a corpse to the pond. The man kept roaring. Ten jugfuls of water were poured on his head. After fifteen jugfuls of water were poured, his body hair stood on end and he began to shiver. He sat up and gaped at the faces of

everyone present. He seemed utterly confused. 'What is all this?' he seemed to wonder. He looked about him again and again. It seemed he was looking for his friends. But the sight of red-turbanned men surrounding him struck fear into his heart. It seemed as though he would faint away.

The *daroga*— Hey you. What is your name?

But he received no reply. He repeated his question three or four times. But no reply came.

The *daroga*— Tell me. What did you do with the money you had stolen from the Nazar's residence?

The man kept gaping at the *daroga* and did not utter a word.

A constable called Bhim Singh said, addressing the *daroga*, 'Huzoor, be so kind as to remove to the verandah. He'll talk. But he feels a little shy in your presence.'

The *daroga* smiled and walked towards the verandah as if some other matter distracted him. Bhim Singh rolled his eyes and demanded, 'You bastard. What is your name?' When no answer came he landed a heavy blow on the man's back with his stick. Bhim Singh repeated the question, 'Hey you. Are you or aren't you going to tell me your name?' The man continued to give a blank stare. Bhim Singh now dealt him three heavy blows in quick succession. At last the man, half dead with fear, said, 'Raghab Mohanty.' Bhim Singh now called the *daroga*, who came closer. On being interrogated for a long time, the man came out with a lot of information.

The fellow was so scared he was unable to give coherent replies to the questions put to him. He could not make sense of a few questions. Sometimes he understood a question all right but could not reply to it properely. Sometimes he said things that made no sense at all. Behind him sat Bhim Singh, a stick in hand. Confessions were extracted from the man just as juice was extracted from a piece of ginger by mashing it. The *daroga* recorded his statement by selecting whatever made sense from all that he had said. It went like this: My name is Raghab Mohanty. I am the *nazar*'s brother-in-law. I live at his residence. I have stolen the money from the *nazar*'s house at the instigation of my friend Prabhudayal Bhagat, and Chitra. I pressed wax on the keyhole of the chest and my friend got a key made, with the help of which we opened the chest. We purchased the

bungalow with three bags of money. Chitra took three handfuls of coins. Some money was spent on buying a few articles. The rest of the money lies under my bed. And so on and on.

When the bed of the accused was shaken out, three hundred sixty-two rupees nine annas and two pice were found. An old stamp paper worth two annas was also found. What was written on it did not make sense at all. When the accused was asked about it he said, 'I have purchased this bungalow. This is what is mentioned in the paper.' The *daroga* laughed and remarked, 'Oh. This then is a sale deed. I did not realise this.' What the man said convinced the *daroga* that he was a complete idiot.

Chitra's house was searched but nothing was found there. From a heap of ash in her back yard was seized five hundred rupees and a bundle of gold ornaments. On being interrogated by the daroga, Chitra claimed that she was innocent and that she knew nothing about the money and the ornaments. Some enemy of hers had buried these in her backyard. The *daroga* sent the ornaments to the *nazar*'s wife through two ladies from good families to ascertain if these belonged to her.

On the previous night three women had gone to sleep together in the *nazar*'s house. The day broke. Where had Chitra gone? May be she had gone to the backyard. Or may be, she had gone to her own house and would be back soon. May be she has just arrived. The slightest noise made the *nazar*'s wife and her mother think that Chitrakala had come. They kept waiting for her staring like two wild cats. At midday two women arrived and showed the bundle of ornaments to the *nazar*'s wife, and asked, 'Are these yours?' When she saw the bundle Bishakha Dei ran to the spot where she had concealed the ornaments the night before. The bundle had disappeared. The mother and her daughter let out a scream and fainted away.

Chapter Sixty-two
The Peshkar Shows Concern

The day was done and the dark had descended. Lights had come on in everyone's house. But the *nazar*'s house lay buried in darkness. Who would light the holy wicks in the clay lamps? The two women lay unconscious. There was no third person in the house to take care of them. A woman arrived at the *nazar*'s house carrying refreshments, *paan*s, and two pieces of cloth in a basket. A barber, a bedroll under his arm, followed her. All doors in the house stood wide open. They came straight to the two women lying half-dead on the ground. They were carrying a hurricane lamp. The woman was quite clever. She took their hands into hers and made them sit up. She made them have a wash. The barber drew water from the well. The woman made them change into new clothes. She then coaxed them to eat the refreshments and made them wash this down with two jugfuls of water. After this she handed them two *paan*s. The mother and her daughter put these cones into their mouths and flopped down on the bed, which the barber had already made for them. Only after all this happened did Mangala Dei ask, 'Who are you, my daughter?' The woman said, 'We have been sent by the *peshkar* and the young master. Don't get scared or worried. We'll constantly stay by your side. Go to sleep. We'll be sitting by you. Don't feel upset. Go to sleep.'

Mangala Dei asked, 'Where is Ragho? What did he eat today?' The woman said, 'He is all right. Don't ask any more questions and go to sleep.'

It is said the sound of a drum travels only a few miles but the word of mouth travels a thousand miles. In no time news of what had come to pass found its way to Rukunadeipur. It concerned the daughter-in-law of a no ordinary family but one belonging to the

karana caste. So one must ensure that family honour was saved. Banambar baboo rushed to Cuttack and took his younger brother's wife in a bullock cart to his village. Bishakha Dei and her mother held each other and wept bitterly. But Banambar baboo did not take the old woman to his village. He left her in Cuttack. One could hear the sound of Bishakha Dei weeping inside the cart four miles away. But who had time to bother about her?

Chapter Sixty-three
The Police Report

The *daroga* of the police station in Cuttack sent a report on the case written in English in form A to the magistrate sahib. The following is the substance of the report translated into Oriya:

Your Highness

Acting on Huzoor's orders I raided the residence of *nazar* Natabar Das and investigated the case of the theft of money. I herewith send a copy of the list of the seized articles along with this report.

As far as the matter of the theft is concerned, it has been clearly established by the statements made by *piadas* of the *nazarkhana*, Khuda Bux, Ram Ram Singh, Bhim Singh that they had collected four thousand seven hundred ninetyeight rupees and eight annas from the mofussil as road cess and other dues. As the cutcherry was closed this amount was kept in the *nazar*'s custody. It is supposed that the money was stolen on Saturday night, the 22nd of May. It appears that the accused number one, Raghab Mohanty, the accused number two, Prabhudayal Bhagat, and the accused number three, Chitrakala conspired to commit this theft. The accused number one, who happens to be the brother-in-law of the *nazar*, is an utterly stupid and evil person. The accused number two is a well-known rascal. He was arrested by the police twice in the past for having committed fraud but he got acquitted on account of want of evidence. Accused number three is a woman of loose morals, a woman of the bazaar, who received special favours from the *nazar*. She was also very close to accused number two, Prabhudayal. Of this, however, the *nazar* was unaware. Chitrakala, a cunning woman, had led the *nazar* to believe that Prabhudayal was her god-brother. As she frequented the *nazar*'s residence, for she worked as a maidservant there, she was able to pass on information about the house to the accused.

As for the theft, acting on their advice, accused number one had brought accused number two and three the wax impressions of the keyholes of all the chests in the house. Accused number two got spare keys made. That accused number one unlocked the *nazar*'s chest and stole the money has been clearly established.

Siusaran Bhagat, a moneylender who lives in Cuttack, owns an old bungalow in Tulsipur area. Accused number two has pocketed three thousand rupees from the stolen money by deceiving accused number one into believing that he would help him buy this bungalow. He got some meaningless things written on a stamp paper worth two annas and gave this to accused number one passing it off as a sale deed. As the latter is a stupid person he failed to realise that he was being deceived. This so-callled sale deed was found lying under the bed of accused number one. I send the same for Huzoor's kind perusal. We have arrested the accused, Raghab Mohanty, who lay in a drunken state in the bungalow. Accused number three has received five hundred rupees as her share of the stolen money. She also stole some gold ornaments from the *nazar*'s wife when the *nazar* was absent from home. As all these have been seized from a heap of ashes in her backyard, a separate list has been submitted to Huzoor.

I may add here that three hundred sixtytwo rupees nine annas and two pice lay under accused number one, Raghab Mohanty's bed. Accused number one and two and a few other wicked persons seemed to have spent the remaining amount on buying intoxicants and food and enjoying themselves. I have arrested accused number one, Raghab Mohanty and accused number three, Chitrakala. I pray that a warrant be issued for the arrest of accused number two, Prabhudayal Bhagat.

4th of June 1879

Nilamani Balabantra
Inspector, Sudder Police Station,
Cuttack

Chapter Sixty-four

The *Nazar* Begins to Repent

Generally speaking, a doer of evil deeds bewails his fate only when he receives the wages of his sin. He thinks to himself that he has earned the displeasure of the almighty. He feels no remorse; he only seeks to find a way out of adversity. He would not be unwilling to do more evil deeds if they could help him escape the danger threatening him at the moment. He may, on occasions, pray to God to deliver him from danger, not for forgiveness. An evil-doer is no different from beasts. One who has received education, and has been raised in a civilised society may defy the dictates of his conscience on account of his nature or under the influence of bad company or for pride or love of pleasure. When such a person is faced with the prospect of receiving punishment for sins he has committed, the fire of remorse burns his heart. In moments like these he even feels scared of uttering the sacred name of the Lord. But he can find no other way out. In the end, he surrenders himself at the feet of the Lord, his heart filled with deep fear and profound devotion.

There was a lock-up inside the Cuttack jail. The pucca building was neither too large nor too small. Eight round holes made on the walls one cubit below the ceiling let whatever sunlight and air into the house they could. Access to the building lay through a large doorway having a double door. The doors were not made of wood, but of iron, and they had been shut with the help of an iron chain and a large brass padlock. As a lamp burned weakly inside, it was not difficult for someone to see what was going on in the house from outside. The inner part of the house was completely cut off from the rest of the world outside and lay absolutely quiet.

As soon as the jail clock struck twelve, a sound pierced the stillness of the place, '*Hukumdhar*'. Five sepoys, their shoes clicking, arrived on the scene. Another guard, a gun slung on his shoulder, took the place of the one who was doing guard duty earlier. He looked into the lock-up and counted the four inmates one by one. The sepoys left shortly afterwards. The new guard kept pacing up and down slowly, his shoes clicking. In the house, four inmates lay on the floor on a blanket. They included a *pana*, who had been arrested on a charge of theft. He lay fast asleep, snoring hard. The second inmate kept tossing and turning on his bed. Now and then he sat up, ran his hand all over his body and lay down once more. This man was a zamindar. He was in jail for having got into a violent quarrel with another zamindar. The third inmate was a rich man's son. He had squandered away his father's property and was charged under the criminal law for having forged a hand note. He had thrown away the blanket he was sleeping on for it was swarming with bedbugs. He was slapping himself hard and kept getting up and lying down restlessly. He also burst into tears a number of times. The fourth inmate sat still, his hands folded, as if he was deep in meditation. From time to time he looked up and bowed with profound reverence. He seemed untroubled by sorrows or remorse. His heart seemed still and quiet, like a deep pond.

A stone lay on a seed sown on the ground, which had not been able to sprout for it had not received sunlight, water or air. But the seed was still alive. When, after a long time, the stone got removed, sunlight fell on the seed and it sprouted and put out leaves. Natabar Das was born into a good family. It was but natural that his heart would retain something of the purity of his origins. Again, he had spent his childhood in the company of good people. As the sage Bishnu Sharma had observed, youth, wealth, power, and refusal to heed one's conscience were all roots of evil. All the first three had come into Natabar Das's possession suddenly. Experts on morality trace the origin of both sins and virtues to man's youth. Whether a human being will take to the path of virtue or that of sin depends upon what kind of direction he receives from his guide.

When Natabar first entered the sphere of worldly life, all the forces of evil were active in his life. There was also nothing that would restrain him. Lord Basudev says that lust, anger and greed are the three doors that lead to hell. Natabar Das's heart might have concealed all kinds of virtues but these three doors stood open before him. Now the time for facing the consequences of his sinful actions had arrived. All the factors responsible for perverting his self had disappeared. The seed of virtue lying dormant in Natabar's heart now began to sprout and put out leaves.

If we open our eye of wisdom, we shall see clearly that dangers are powerful guides sent by God to bring men, who have lost their way, back to the path of virtue.

Natabar Das sat, his eyes closed, deep in meditation. He thought to himself, 'Alas. How could I tell lies after all this has come to pass? In response to the question of the magistrate sahib I replied, "I am innocent. I am innocent." But if I am innocent, who then is guilty in the world? What sins have I not committed? I have committed all kinds of sins with impunity. Have I misappropriated government funds? Am I being punished for that crime? Certainly not. I deserve severe punishment for the sins I have committed. The punishment meted out to me is not adequate. I suppose this is but the beginning. The hell to which I will be sent is being prepared. Every sin I have committed is unforgivable.'

'O my mother, who was ailing all her life. I have never done my duty to you. I have never remembered the love and affection you gave me even for a day. O my mother, you have kept your body, enfeebled by illness, alive by taking a pinch of opium, which you buy with the little money that is your life's saving. I did not give you even two rupees to which you are entitled. Instead I wrote to you in a letter using hard words, "I give you whatever I do out of mercy." O mother, how deeply hurt you must have felt on reading this letter? If you had laid a curse on me and destroyed me at that very moment, many innocent lives could have been saved from me. O my merciful mother. I was told you did not let even a sigh escape you, lest that might bring harm to me.

'Dhaima, Dhaima. What pains you took to raise me! You washed and cleaned me when I was a child. I remember that whenever I fell even slightly ill, you would not take food or go to sleep and would sit all night holding me on your lap. But I have never shown you respect. I have never done you a good turn. Instead, I have caused you intense pain by saying rude things to you. On many occasions have I refused to pay any heed to your good advice and your sage counsel. I got you to write a report by employing deceitful means. I have robbed your daughter, who is the apple of your eyes, of everything she had. Things came to such a pass that she found it difficult to feed and clothe herself and her dependents. So many helpless women, so many widows groaned under the weight of terrible hardships. Merciful Dhaima. Come and see how the sound of their wailing has burnt to cinders the soul of your sinful son. Kindhearted, virtuous Dhaima. I have ruined you. But you have never said one single harsh word to me and have never wished me ill. Dhaima. You have forgiven me, but why should God forgive me? If He does so, justice will disappear from the world, sin will overwhelm it, and humanity will come to terrible grief.

Chandamani. Queen Chandamani. You are pious, simple-hearted, and virtuous. How deeply you love me and how you revere me. Yet I harmed you when you had been struck by a terrible misfortune and robbed you of everything you had adopting deceitful means. Even the greatest sinner on earth would have been ashamed of such a diabolic deed. If I succeed in enjoying the wealth I have stolen from your children by giving them false comfort, I' ll think religion and justice do not exist, and God, who sees everything and all powerful, does not exist either.

Unfortunate tenants of Naripur!You lost your pious and kindhearted master and fell into the clutches of a bloodthirsty demon like me, who tormented you for eight long years. Fear not. The sound of your wailing has reached the merciful Lord at last. I have looted the property of hundreds of tenants. Having lost their land, which was their only source of sustenance, they now roam as beggars.

Alas. My two nephews who have lost your father. I never meant it when I told you that you were my eyes' delight. That was a deception I practised on you in order to rob you of everything belonging to you. The truth is you are the mainstay of my life. I am childless, a sinner. You would have helped me to find deliverance. For eight long years I have wished you ill. But you are completely unaware of this. But how could anything be kept concealed from all-seeing Almighty?

Alas. Alas. I find no one by my side who could solace me in this time of calamity. But why should anyone come to me now? Have I treated anyone with respect? Why should I expect anything in return from anyone when I have done nothing for him or her? If someone came from my village to my residence, I said rude things to him and drove him away for I did not want to feed him at night. I have earned more than one lakh rupees, but I have never given even one paise to a starving beggar. I had saved money as if it was precious like my life-blood, but at this moment of crisis not even one paise of that money is of any help. Has ill-gotten wealth ever delivered anyone from danger?

Dowson sahib. I owe all my prosperity to you alone. Whatever glory or prestige I have enjoyed I owe only to you. You loved me like your own son. But how much money I have stolen from you, how many times I have cheated you! What a kind-hearted man you are! Chandamani is a widow. I handed a forged report in her name to you at your bungalow, put ground pepper in my eyes and shed copious tears. I found that my tears moved you deeply and you could not see through my game. You put the seal of approval on my report. If you had been around, would I have been sent to jail? But it is fated that you would be away. The Lord has made sure you would be in England just at this time.

O God. O God. I feel that you have sent this calmity to purify my tainted life. O God. May your will be done. O merciful Lord. In you I place all my hopes of deliverance. Chitrakala. Prabhudayal. You were my companions on my journey to hell. Now you have acted like true friends for you have done something that will prevent me from proceeding towards hell. I salute you. At long last you have done things that will contribute to my future

well-being. It is because of you that I now find myself here. You have done a very good thing indeed. I would have committed many more sins. I would have ruined two simple and innocent boys and would have spent an eternity in hell. You have placed obstacles on my way. So I won't be able to proceed down this road any further. I salute you once more.

Bishakha Dei. You are my wife. Whatever you may be, I had promised before the holy fire of the marriage altar that I would love you with a pure heart. But all my life I have deceived you and have done despicable things, like a beast. You were taken in by my deceitful words and revered me as if I was a deity. You may or may not be possessed of many virtues, but you are a chaste woman and you are devoted to your husband. I have touched you with my tainted hands. You are now utterly helpless. Your *dharma* will save you.

Brother Banambar. I bow a million times at your lotus feet. I have demanded and taken half of whatever paddy you harvested as my share of the paternal property. You have always measured out the paddy quietly, without saying a single harsh word.

Pita dharma, pita svargah, pitahi paramam tapah— O my father, who is now in your heavenly abode, forgive your son, who is a selfish, wicked sinner, who has ruined your family. He is not fit to utter your name.

O merciful Lord, our Father. I have never taken your name with feelings of genuine reverence. I now feel too scared to even utter your holy name. I used to hold a chaplet of *tulsi* beads only to fool people. O God! O God! How could one deceive people in your name? O you redeemer of the fallen, saviour of the helpless, ocean of mercy, save me. O Lord, I am a sinner. No greater sinner than I lives on the earth. No matter what a great sinner I might be, there is a limit to my sinfulness. But your mercy is limitless. So I am sure of being delivered. Give me whatever punishment you want to inflict on me. I bow to you.'

At this moment a peculiar feeling of confidence, a strange feeling of peace flowed into the heart of Natabar Das. Forgetting everything else, he folded his hands and called out in a loud voice, 'O Lord. Save me. Save me.' He then began to sing very loudly:

I am swept off by the currents of the ocean of grief
Give me shelter at your lotus feet, where there is no fear
May my life fall apart, but punish me O Lord
So that my life gets purified
No other way out can I see
Day and night the fire of sin consumes my soul

Natabar Das's song awakened the other three prisoners and they sat up. It seemed to them as if someone was pouring nectar into their hearts. They sat still, hands folded, listening to the song. For a moment each one of them forgot all about the danger facing him. The guard also listened to the song, motionless like a puppet, his gun lying on his shoulder. He too felt as if someone was pouring nectar into his heart. Day broke. The guard said, starting, 'Hey prisoner. Keep quiet. Making noise is forbidden here.' The prisoner became quiet after the guard said this a couple of times. He, however, remained seated, his hands folded, like before.

Chapter Sixty-five
The Trial

It was summer. Offices functioned during morning hours. Today a vast crowd of onlookers filled the area lying between the gate of the jail and the entrance of the sessions court. All the people in the bazaar seemed to have poured into the place, which was so packed, if one threw a saucer over their heads, it would not drop to the ground. *Nazar* Natabar Das was to face trial today. The district magistrate had forwarded his case to the sessions court. At seven in the morning the three accused, surrounded by eight guards carrying guns fitted with bayonets, appeared. The three consisted of two men and one woman. The right hand of one of the two men was handcuffed to the left hand of the other. The man who walked on the left side was very black in complexion and looked like a huge monster. He seemed scared and restless like a wild male buffalo, which had been tied up and was being dragged out. The man walking on the right was a good-looking person and he walked on calmly, his gaze fixed on the sky. His face bore no trace of sorrow or self-pity. People were surprised when it seemed as if he broke into a smile now and then. On seeing this, a few gentlemen among the onlookers let out sighs. The woman who walked behind the two men had covered part of her face with the end border of her saree. The three accused were lined up before the judge sahib.

The *peshkar* announced, 'Huzoor. The government is the plaintiff. The defendants are accused number one, *Nazar* Natabar Das, accused number two, Raghab Mohanty alias Ragho Biswal and accused number three, Chitrakala. The case falls under sections 409 and 379.'

The first witness, *daroga* Nilamani baboo saluted the sahib, raising his right hand, touching his forehead with his index finger and then quickly opening his palm. But, before he could go into the dock to give his testimony, *nazar* Natabar Das said in a very loud voice, 'Huzoor. Huzoor. The witness can wait. Please let me make a statement.' The guard tried to silence him, but the accused screamed so loudly that the sahib could not do any work before giving him an opportuniy to make a statement. The handcuff binding him to the other accused was unlocked. He came into the dock and poured out a stream of words, some of which made sense and some did not. The following is a gist of what he said:

'I have not stolen government's money. I am innocent as far as that case is concerned. But I have submitted a report to the government in my sister Chandamani's name forging her signature when she lay unconscious after receiving the news of her husband's death. On the strength of this report I enjoyed almost absolute power over the estate of Naripur. I stole gold ornaments worth forty or fifty thousand rupees belonging to widow Chandamani. I reduced hundreds of tenants to beggars by taking their land away. I have stolen a lot of money belonging to my minor nephews. I sold off rice worth nearly forty thousand rupees and pocketed the amount.' He disclosed how he had misappropriated money in other ways. At last he said, 'I had planned to purchase the estate of Naripur at an auction by not depositing the revenue due to the government. To execute this plan I amassed more than one lakh rupees collected through all kinds of unfair means. This money and the gold ornaments of Chandamani I have kept in an iron chest. All this money and the ornaments belong to my young nephews. This should be returned to them. I wanted to be the king of Naripur. Ha Ha.Ha. I am the king of Naripur. Judge sahib. Salute me. Ha. Ha.' The accused broke into laughter and jumped down from the dock. He let out a terrible scream and sang before the judge sahib, laughing wildly:

The king and his minister go out riding an elephant
The fly whisk is waved and the banner flutters
A golden umbrella is held over their heads.

Ha. Ha. Ha. I am a king. Sahib, salute me.

He let out wild screams and jumped about. It seemed as if he would wreck the courtroom. He was so strong even two guards could not hold him down. People said that he now got his strength from Satan. Five or six guards pinned him down and slapped two handcuffs on his wrist. Another four guards pulled a length of rope, one end of which was tied round his waist. A letter was written to the civil surgeon and the accused was removed to the lunatic asylum.

Accused number two, Raghab Mohanty could not make sense of the questions, and even when he did he could not make any coherent replies. Now and then he wailed loudly, like a donkey. Cross-examining him came to an end after a lot of questions were put to him. On seeing how miserable the accused was, everyone in the courtroom including the sahib felt pity for him.

When it was Chitrakal's turn to be cross-examined, she said, 'Who has seen me steal the money? Nothing has been seized from my house. Some enemy of mine has planted stolen goods in my backyard at night. I was asleep. How could I know who did so? I don't know who Prabhudayal and Raghab Mohanty are. Let the *nazar*'s wife come to the courtroom and swear, *tulsi* leaves and copper in hand, that I have stolen the money. I am innocent. I'll get acquitted. If stolen goods are not seized from one's house, one does not get punished.'

Chitrakala spoke with great energy and the sahib recorded her deposition, smiling. Seeing the sahib smile, Chitrakla felt encouraged and became even more voluble.

Chapter Sixty-six
The Trial Comes to an End

The cross-examination of the witnesses and the accused by the government lawyer came to an end. The government lawyer gave a spirited lecture trying to prove that the accuseds were guilty.

Of the three accused, only Chitrakala had hired a young inexperienced lawyer to defend her. Flailing his arms and shaking his head vigorously, her lawyer harangued the court. He would have gone on and on if the judge sahib had not curtly ordered him to sum up. The lawyer ended his speech trying to prove that his client was a simple woman, who made an honest living by doing hard work, that her life was a very pure one and that there was no eyewitness evidence against her and also that no stolen goods had been seized from her house. He claimed that she was innocent and, therefore, should be acquitted.

Chapter Sixty-seven
The Verdict

A large crowd gathered in the cutcherry today to hear the final verdict on the case. The sahib arrived in the courtroom at seven in the morning and read out his verdict. The accused stood before him.

The full verdict filled half a quire of fullscap paper. We will give only its gist here. The sahib wrote the following on the accused: Accused number one, Natabar Das, the *nazar*, is found not guilty as far as the present case under section 409 is concerned. He has not misappropriated government funds. Of course, his negligence has led to the money being stolen. He is acquitted. However, the government's money should be recovered from his property.

Accused number two, Prabhudayal Bhagat is an extremely wicked person. However, since he has absconded, no sentence can be passed on him.

The accused number three, Raghab Mohanty is an utterly stupid person. He lacks the intelligence to understand the consequences of his actions. He stole the money acting under the influence of wicked persons. We, therefore, wish to pass a light sentence on him. He is sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment.

The accused number four, Chitrakala is a cunning woman of the bazaar and a woman of loose morals. She kept *nazar* Natabar Das in her thrall through her cleverness. It was her advice, her strategies, her assistance and the information provided by her which enabled the other accused to commit the theft. Acting very cleverly and treacherously, she stole the gold ornaments from the *nazar*'s house. She has also not neglected to adopt all kinds of ruses to escape being found out. We, therefore, sentence her to five years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of two hundred rupees. In the event of her failure to pay the fine, her sentence would be extended by one more year.

G.A. Macpherson
Sessions Judge, Cuttack

Glossary

Abadhan	:	a village schoolmaster
Ambila	:	a curry with acid taste
Baboo	:	a respectful address prefixed to the names of gentlemen, corresponding to English Mr. or Esq
Badi pala		the performance by two or more parties of rival pala singers
Bala Gopal	:	the name refers to child Krishna.
Bharan	:	a measure of corn
Bilayati	:	British
Bishodhini	:	a final rent received granted by a landlord to a ryot when the balance of a year's rent is paid in full
Brahmabid	:	one who has realized the Brahman.
Brahma tala	:	name of a Hindu musical tune
Brindaban	:	a small city in the district of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, India associated with Lord Krishna's childhood
Buggy	:	a carriage
Chakala	:	an administrative unit formed during Maratha rule in Orissa
challan	:	to send an accused to police custody
Chapkan	:	a long Indian coat reaching to the knees
Chaprassi	:	an orderly peon, peon wearing a badge
choupadhi	:	military stations
Chhamukaran	:	a personal accounts clerk
Chillum	:	the bowl or firepot of a hookah for smoking tobacco or cannabis
Chitou		a pancake made of rice paste and shredded, ground coconut
Cowries		Seashells used as currency before British rule in Orissa
Cutcherry		government offices and law courts collectively, a government or private office

Dakshina		gifts of cash given to Brahmins at the end of a ritual
Digapalas		guardian deities
Dandidar		a broker or middleman who purchases merchandise or grains
Daroga		police officer
Dharma		duty/a good act/meritorious deed/fortune/luck/ welfare/virtue acquired by good actions
Dhoti		a piece of cloth worn round the waist; waist cloth
Dilkhosh		Light-heartedness, gaiety, gladness
Gana		according to Hindu system of astrology a series of lunar mansions classed under three heads: deities, men and demons
Gumasta		accountant; clerk.
Haribol		Utter the name of Lord Hari
Harilut		a grand feast where caste distinctions are ignored
Hookah		a pipe for smoking tobacco.
Huzoor		a term of respect
Jagir		rent free land
Kabuli		belonging to Kabul
Kachuri		a soft cake made from flour and pulses.
Kali		goddess Chandi or Kalika/a dark complexioned woman.
karana	:	a writer caste in Orissa
Karji	:	village accountant
Karna	:	a character in *The Mahabharat* renowned for his valour and generosity. Kunti's son, fathered by the Sun-god, when she was a maiden
Kaviraja	:	a country physician practicing indigenous system of medicine
Ketu		an evil planet according to Hindu system of astrology
Khansma		cook
Kharadapani		an illegal exaction realized by zamindars or rent collectors from ryots to defray the expenses of collecting the legal rent

Khandayat	:	a warrior caste in Orissa given rent free lan in return of military service
Kirtan	:	chanting of hymns toGod by a party of singers.
Krushna	:	the eighth incarnation of Bishnu; Dark blue colour.

la illaha –illala – mahamad rasul illala:
there is no god but god and Mohammed is his messenger.

Magha	:	lunar month corresponding to November-December
Makara	:	the sign of Capricorn in the zodiac/a mythological marine animal (half beast and half fish)/ the lunar month of Maglia/ a god relationship or sworn friendship set up between two persons by each feeding the other some *makara* rice
Maniabandh	:	a design on cotton saris
Maqadam	:	A tenure holder under a zamindar
Mausa	:	one's mother's sister's husband
Mesha	:	Ram, sheep/ the sign of the Aries/the lunar month of Baishakh
Moffussil	:	rural; relating to the countryside or village
Moong	:	a variety of pulse
Mouza	:	a village, being the unit of some houses or plots, fixed for revenue purposes
Mrudanga	:	Drum
Muktar	:	a representative of a party in a court; a lawyer of the lowest grade, authorized agent.
Munshikhana	:	the office where deed writers do their work/the office of a collector's court; the vernacular office of a collector's court
Nata Mandir	:	the dancing hall attached to a temple
Nazar	:	head of a section in the Collector's office particularly in charge of cash; a Persian word meaning bailiff of a court; the officers controlling the peons of a court

Paan		betel leaf /a cone of betel leaf rolled with small pieces of betel nuts and spices inside it.
Padhiari		a door keeper; a class of servants of the deity in Jagannath temple at Puri
Paik	:	a foot soldier, peon, footman
Pala	:	religious songs accompanied by songs and dance; the ceremony opf worshipping the deity, Satyanarayan
Palau		rice cooked with meat and ghee
Pancuati		a ceremony performed on the fifth day of a child's birth when fried rice is distributed
Pata		a hand-woven silk saree
Pathan		Mohammedan, another term for referring to a muslim
Patwari		a village officer in charge of revenue papers; village accountant
Peshkar		a clerk who puts up papers before a superior officer
Piada	:	messenger, peon
Prasad	:	food offered to a deity
Puri	:	a roll of flour fried in ghee
Rahu	:	the Dragon head/ evil planet according to systems of Indian astrology
Ram		interjection used when a person sees or hears or speaks a prohibited thing/the seventh incarnation of Vishnu; the eldest son of Dasarath, king of Ayodhya.
Rudra tala		the musical measure accompanying the tha dance of Lord Siva
Sahib		a distinguishing term used for Europeans and Eurasians, term of respect used to address a high official
Salami	:	a present given to a landlord by a purchaser of a holding or ryot, a present given to a landlord or king by a visitor on the occasion of the first visit, salute of cannon or gunfire in honour of distinguished personalities.

Samkranti		the transition of the sun from one sign of the zodiac to another
Sanad	:	a written order signed and sealed by a king
sangata	:	an intimate friend
Sastra	:	scriptures
Sathighara	:	a room where godess Sathi, who prptects children is worshipped
Snana Purnima	:	the ceremony of bathing the images of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra on the full-moon day in the lunar month of Jaistha
Sudder	:	administrative head-quarters of a district or division or province, a town.
Tabla	:	a one-faced drum
Touji	:	a number given to a zamindari
Touji nabis	:	one who keeps a record of the touzis
·Tulsi	:	the holy basil plant
Ukhuda	:	fried paddy seasoned with sugar or treacle
Yudhisthir	:	a character in *The Mahabharat* renowned for his righteousness, son of Kunti fathered by Lord Dharma
Zamadar	:	head constable; the chief peon
Zamindar	:	a landlord
Zamindari	:	an estate

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